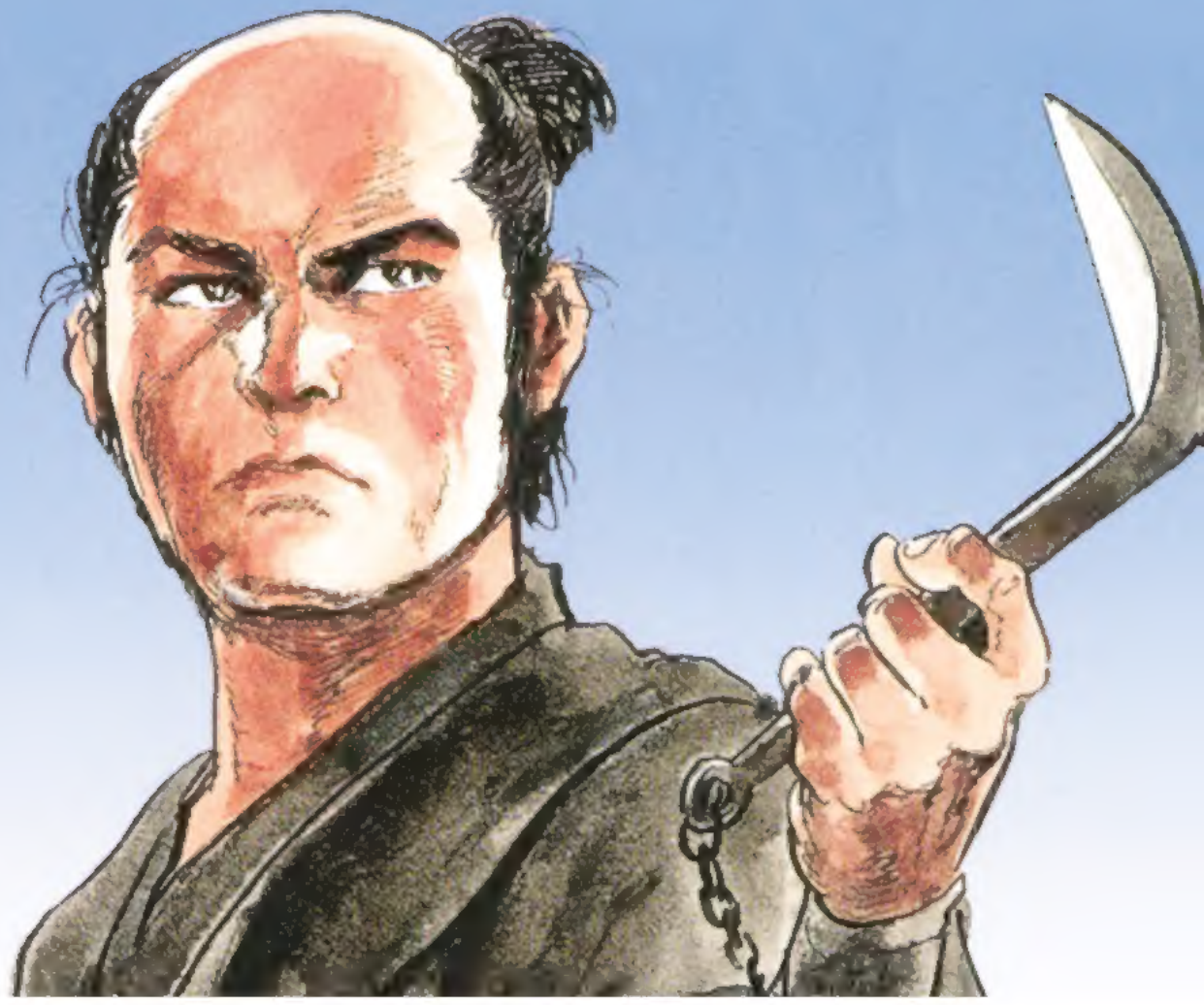

半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

VOLUME 3

COMPARISON OF A MAN

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

Lifelong Friends, with the Same Dreams,
Striving to Grow into a Rising River.

story
KAZUO KOIKE

art
GOSEKI KOJIMA

®
DARK HORSE MANGA™

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半蔵の門

COMPARISON OF A MAN

by KAZUO KOIKE
& GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME

3

"A tiger of a father and a wolf of a brother . . . sandwiched between the two, I wonder what my tomorrow holds."

In the first year of Eiroku (Year 1558), Matsudaira Motonobu (Ieyasu) successfully captures Mikawa Terabe Castle using both the tactics of surprise and Hattori Hanzō's ninja techniques. It is a fantastic outcome for his first battle. This victory earns him the trust of Imagawa Yoshimoto, and Yoshimoto grants him permission to change his name to Motoyasu. Meanwhile, Oda Nobunaga foresees Yoshimoto's move against the capital and strives to block his ambitions. How slim are Motoyasu's chances if he must go to war as a member of Imagawa forces?

半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

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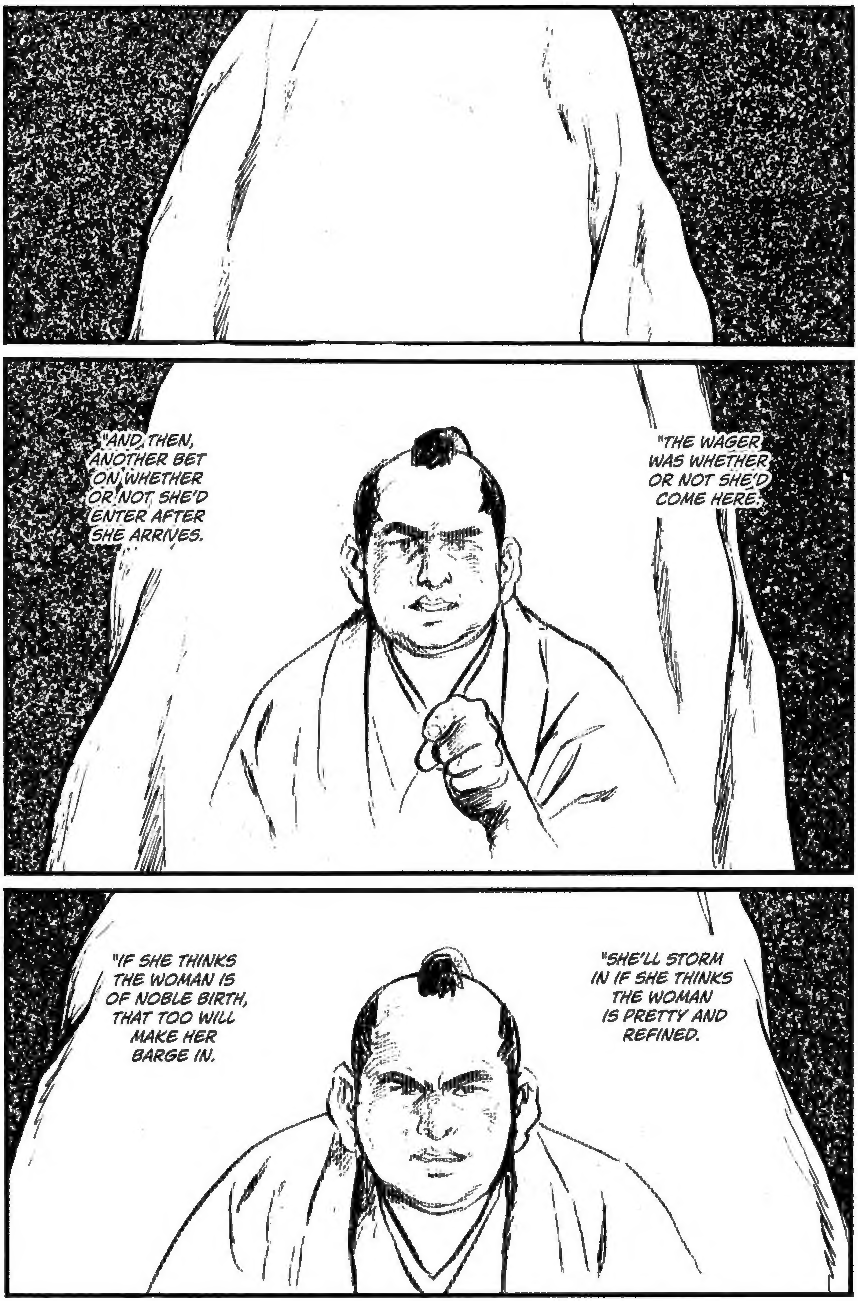
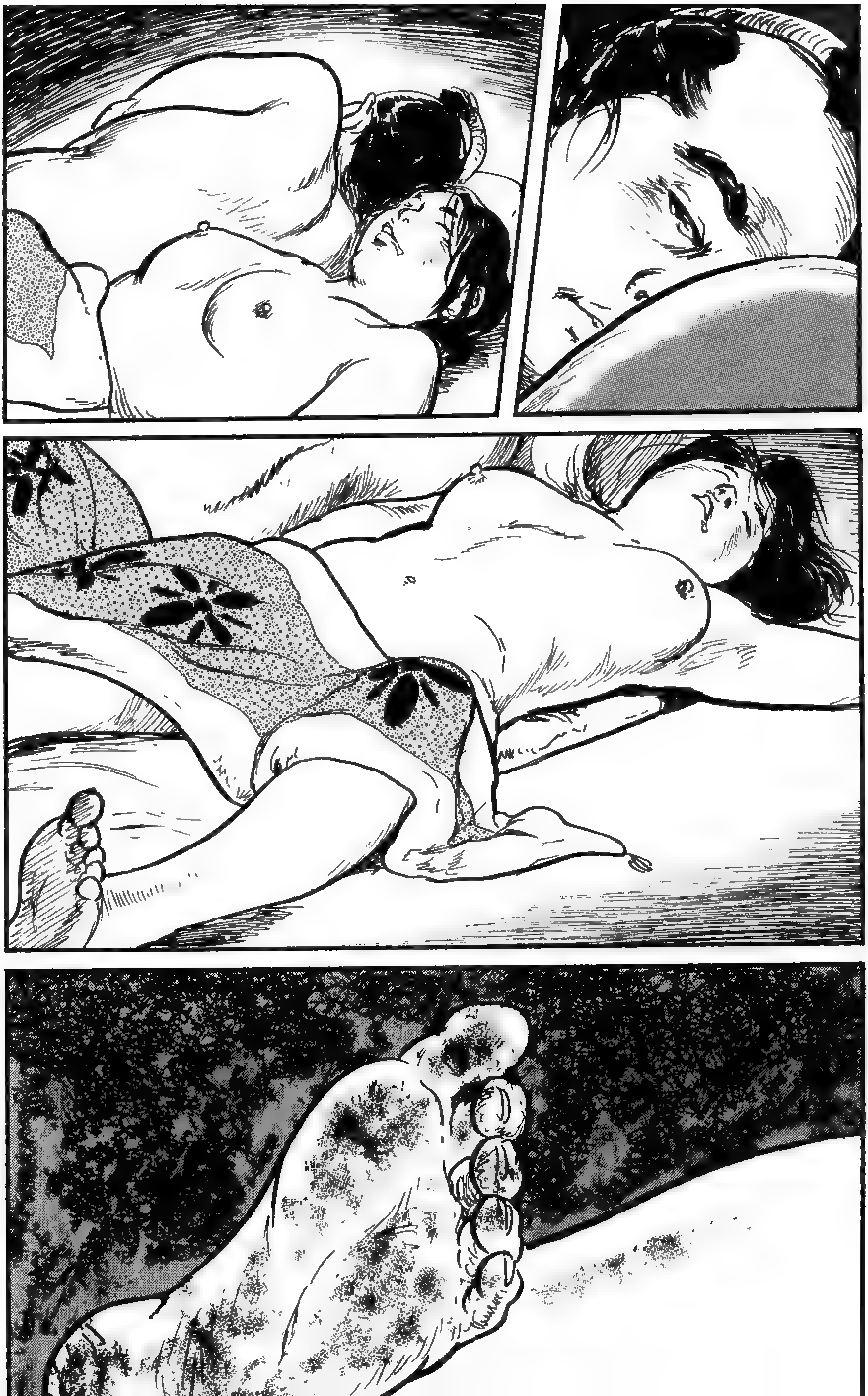
Chapter On Relinquishing Factions

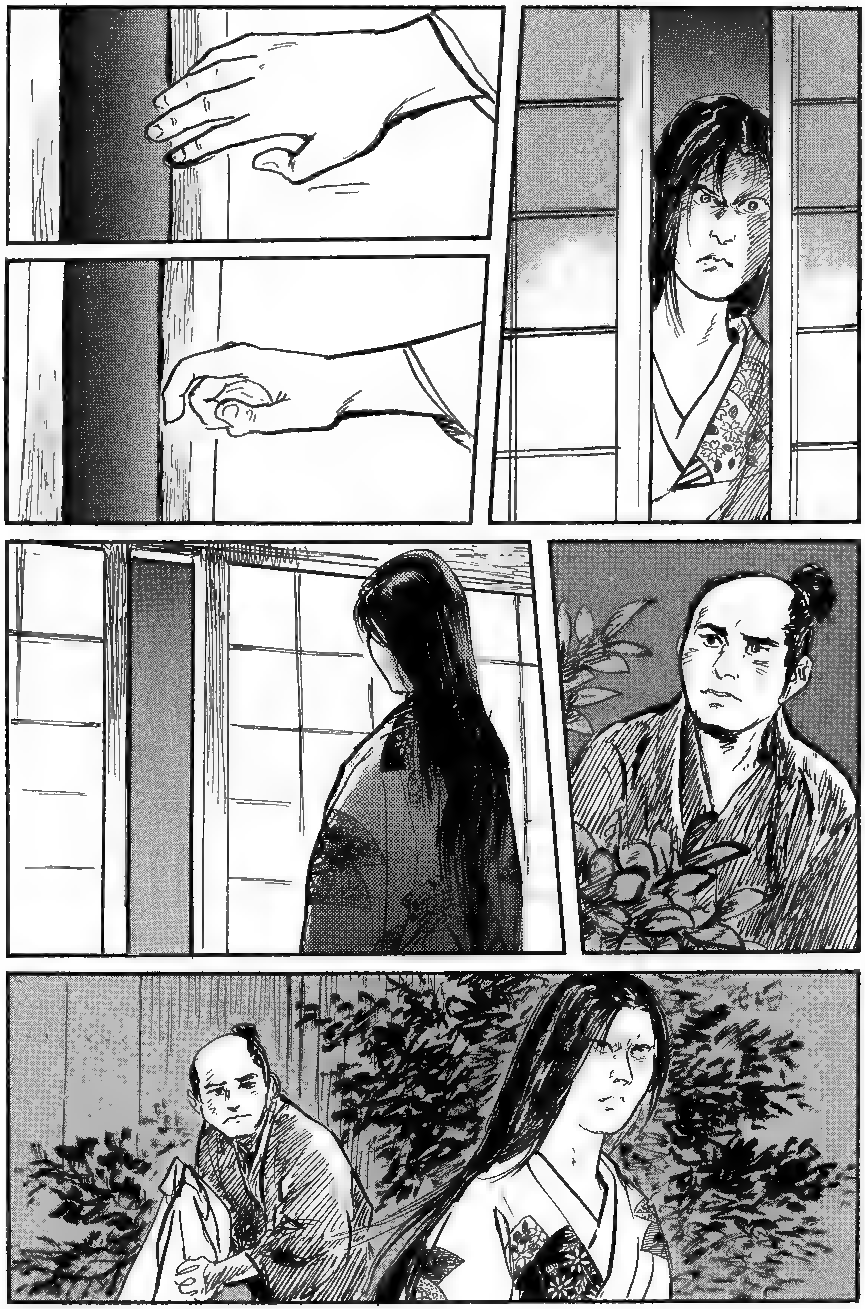
No. 5: It Rains at Home, and it Rains on the Battlefield, Part 2

HANZÓ REMEMBERED THE WORDS OF HIS MASTER.
"ANSWER HER EVERY QUESTION."


"AND THEN, ANOTHER BET ON WHETHER OR NOT SHE'D ENTER AFTER SHE ARRIVES...
"THE WAGER WAS WHETHER OR NOT SHE'D COME HERE."
"IF SHE THINKS THE WOMAN IS OF NOBLE BIRTH, THAT TOO WILL MAKE HER BARGE IN.
"SHE'LL STORM IN IF SHE THINKS THE WOMAN IS PRETTY AND REFINED.

"...MY FIRE ATTACK WILL BEAR ITS FIRST FRUIT."
"BUT IF SHE DOESN'T THINK SO, SHE'LL STAY OUT. THAT'S WHEN...





SINCE TONIGHT.
SINCE WHEN?
SHE IS A TEA PICKER.
WHO IS SHE?

HE MUST BE TAKEN WITH HER CHARM AND NAIVETÉ.
WHY...?
STRIP

SHUP
MM.
YOU DON'T LOOK YOUNG.

THERE'S NOTHING YOUTHFUL ABOUT YOU AT ALL.
SURE.
SAY SOMETHING!
HM, NOT AT ALL, EH?
NO LUSTER. NO SPIRIT OR VIGOR!

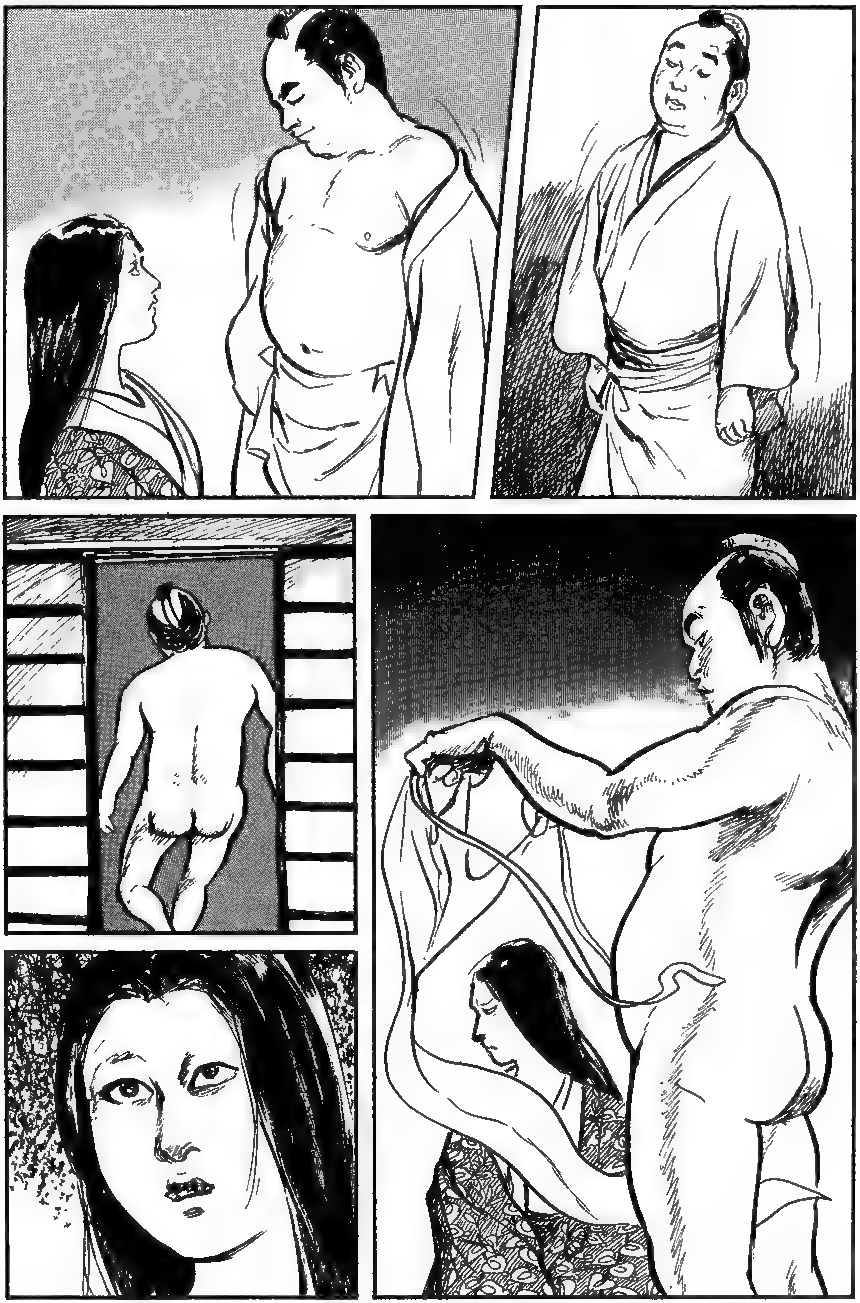
HO! MY EYES, NOW?
I DON'T LIKE YOUR EYES.
YOUR EYES CAN HARDLY BE CALLED THOSE OF A WARLORD.
NO SHARPNESS OF A HAWK. NO HUNGER OF A SNAKE.
MM. IN OTHER WORDS, MINE ARE ORDINARY, THEN?
NO GLEAM, EITHER.

I GUESS I'VE GAINED SOME MORE.
YOU SHOULD DO SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR WEIGHT, TOO.
HM.
I ALSO HATE THE WAY YOU TALK. LIKE A DRY OLD MAN.
MM. SHLUP.
HEH HA HA HA HA.
HM. I'M MOTO-MOTO YASU. I GUESS MY PRICE TAG IS CHEAP BY NATURE.
OTHERS WILL LOOK DOWN ON YOU IF YOU STAY SO FLABBY AND LOOSE.

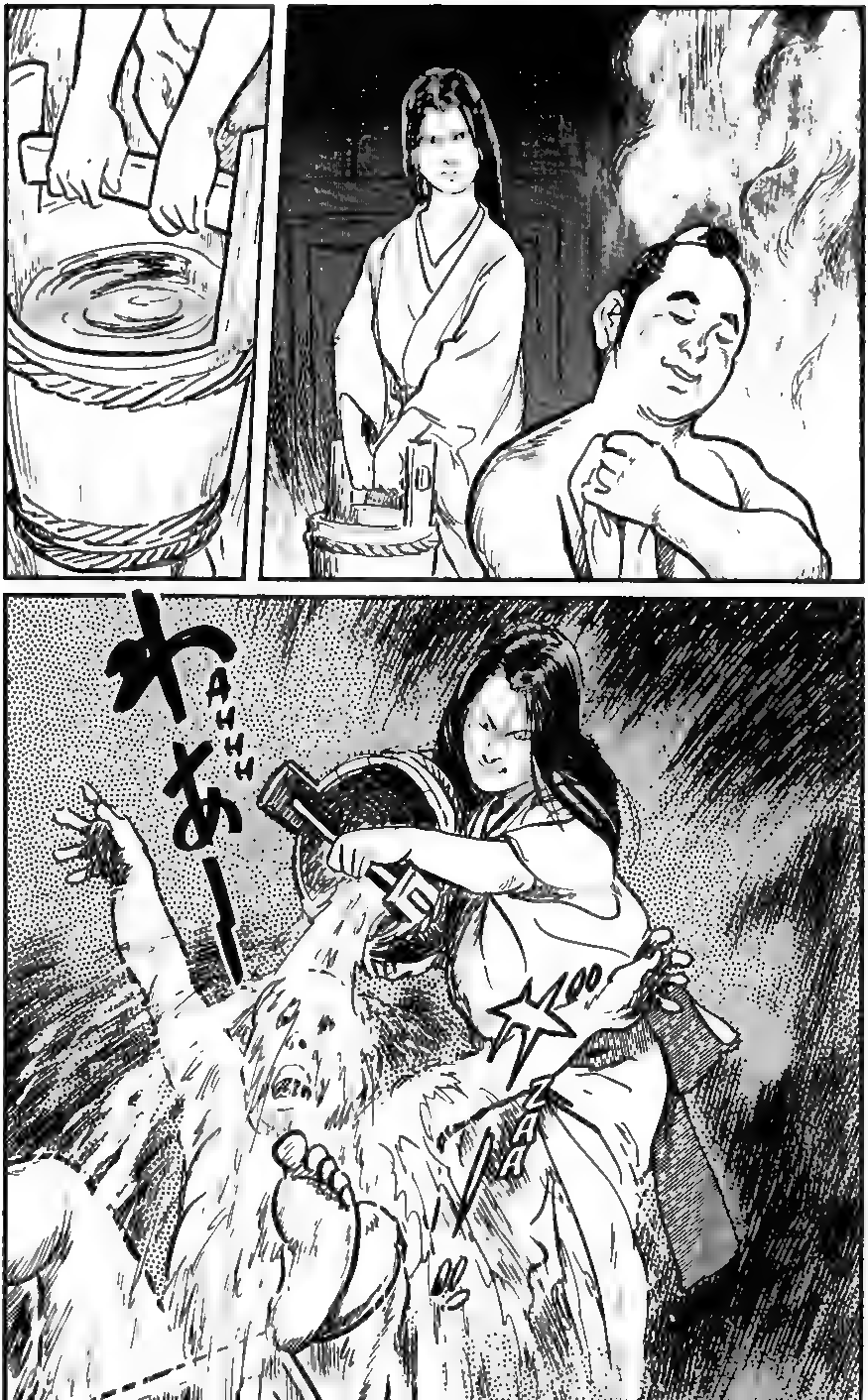
THEY USUALLY PICK NAMES LIKE TSURU OR KAME FOR GIRLS, YOU KNOW.
IN COMPARISON, TSUKIYAMA, YOUR NAME MAKES YOU AS FIRM AS A ROCK.
TO HOLD A STAR, BUILD A MOUNTAIN...
TSUKIYAMA OF HŌSEI CHIKUZAN, EH?
WHEN I WAS A GIRL...
WHAT A NICE NAME OYAKATA-SAMA HAS COME UP WITH.
I SEE. I GET IT.
NO. IF I GIVE BIRTH TO STRONG CHILDREN, THEY WILL BECOME MY MOUNTAIN AND LET ME HOLD A STAR IN MY ARMS.

HMM YEP
OYAKATA SAMA
TOO
KNEADED
THE
MOUNTAIN
HMM

HOW ABOUT A DRINK?
NO, NOTHING.
WHAT?!
ALL RIGHT. WHY DON'T I TAKE A BATH.
YOU ARE FILTHY.
YOUR BODY IS DIRTY, TOO.
YOUR HAND IS DIRTY.
ABOUT... WHAT?
HOW COME YOU AREN'T UPSET AFTER ALL I SAID!



IEYASU JUDGED HIMSELF SUCCESSFUL IN LIGHTING A FIRE.
HE COULD SENSE THAT THE SMOLDERING INSIDE TSUKIYAMA'S HEART WAS SPREADING AND TURNING INTO A RAGING BLAZE.
THE CALMER I AM, THE STRONGER HER FIRE WILL GROW, AND IN TIME IT SHOULD BECOME IMPOSSIBLE TO STOP...
MM
IF I LET HER GOADING UPSET ME, I MIGHT PUT OUT THAT PRECIOUS SPARK.


あー
AHHH

IT FELT GOOD.
HO HO HO. YOU ARE FILTHY.
HO
HO
HO
HO
HO
HO
IT... IT'S COLD!
WILL YOU POUR ONE RIGHT HERE TOO?

I IMAGINE YOU'D LIKE IT BETTER TO HAVE A COLD ONE INSIDE YOU.
AH...

AAHHH
AAHHH

UHHH.
UHHH.
AH!!
AHH, DARLING...
AHH, DARLING
YES...
DO YOU
LOVE ME?

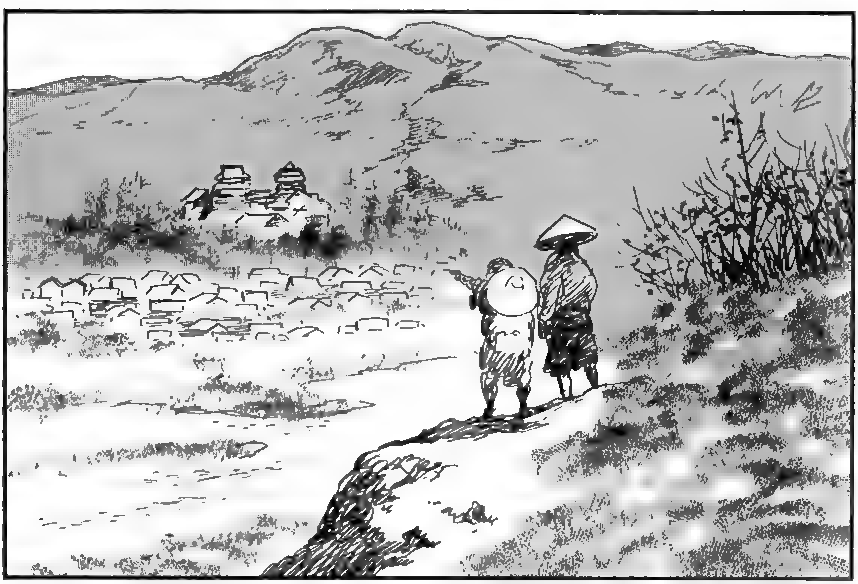
THE SUN HAS COME OUT THEN?
...BUT IT'S EXHAUSTING.
THE CASTLE HAS FALLEN...
AT LEAST IT WON'T BE RAINING ANYMORE AT HOME.

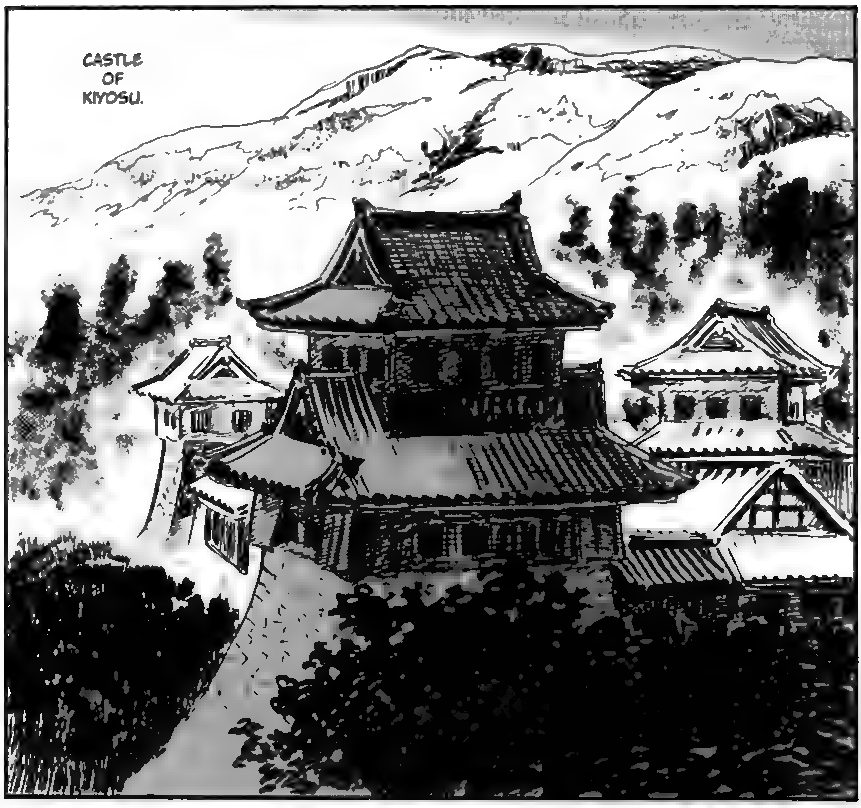
TUp

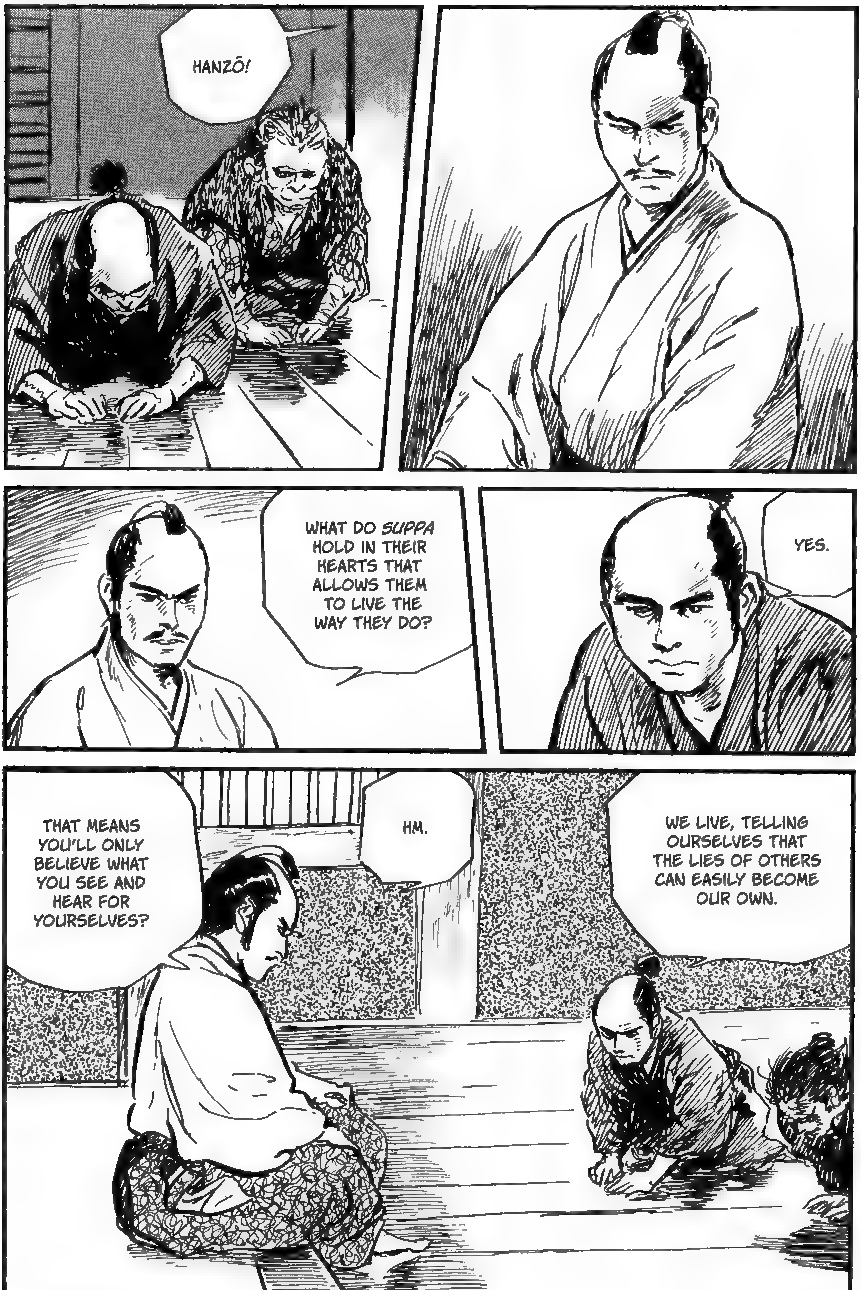
SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH MY STOMACH. I'VE BEEN FARTING ALL DAY.

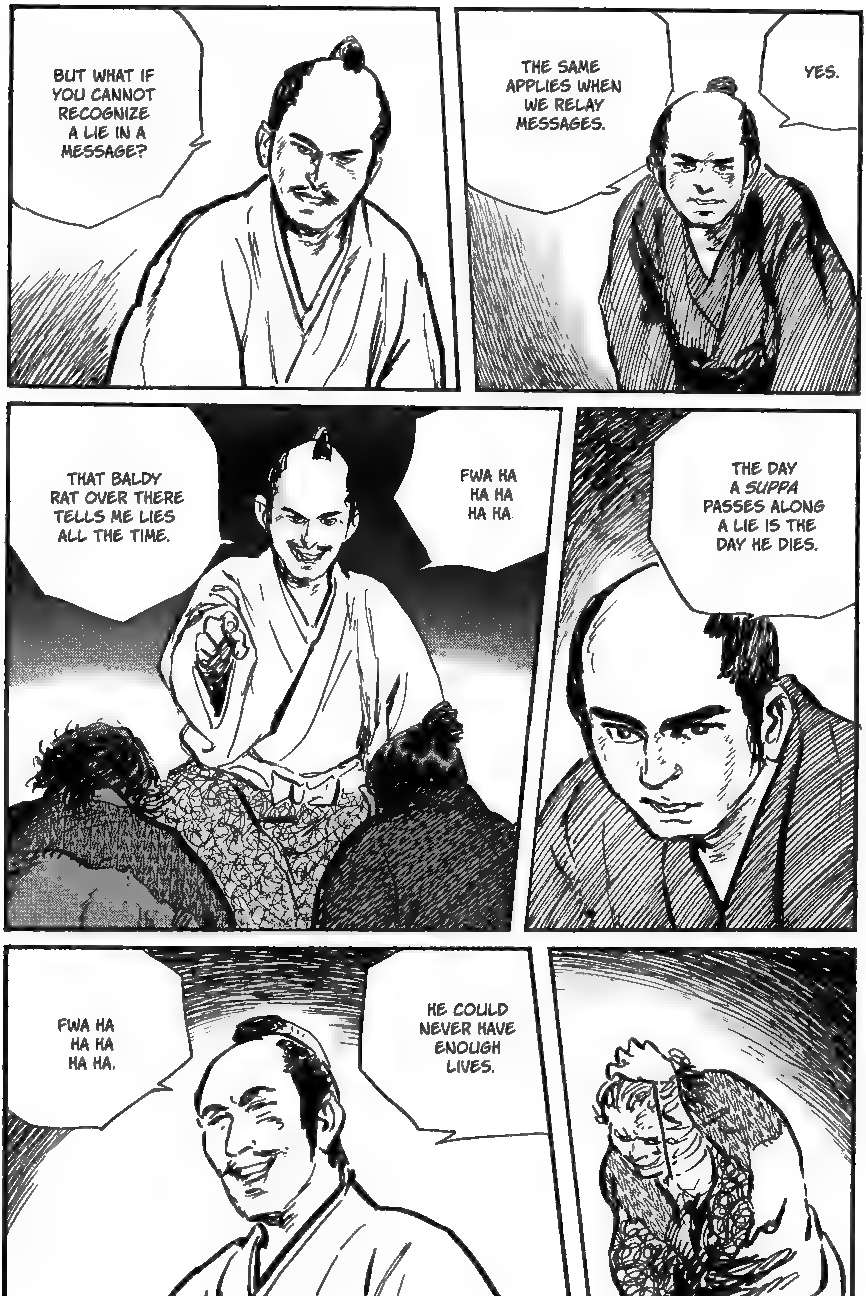
REMEMBER I PROMISED TO LET YOU SEE MY LORD, NOBUNAGA-SAMA, IN PERSON?
?!
I'VE COME TO TAKE YOU.
WAIT. I MUST HAVE MY MASTER'S PERMISSION.
LET'S GO.
ODA AND IMAGAWA ARE ENEMIES. WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS IF HE SENDS HIS MAN TO ODA?
DON'T BE A FOOL.

IF YOU GO WITHOUT TELLING ANYONE AND COME BACK UNNOTICED, THERE'S NO PROBLEM.
NITWIT!
THAT WOULD BE AN ILLICIT LIAISON. THERE'S NO CHANCE HE'D GIVE YOU PERMISSION.
I'LL GO.
THE QUESTION IS WHETHER OR NOT YOU TRUST ME. THAT'S ALL.




CASTLE
OF
KIYOSU.


HANZŌ!
WHAT DO *SUPPA* HOLD IN THEIR HEARTS THAT ALLOWS THEM TO LIVE THE WAY THEY DO?
YES.
THAT MEANS YOU'LL ONLY BELIEVE WHAT YOU SEE AND HEAR FOR YOURSELVES?
HM.
WE LIVE, TELLING OURSELVES THAT THE LIES OF OTHERS CAN EASILY BECOME OUR OWN.


BUT WHAT IF YOU CANNOT RECOGNIZE A LIE IN A MESSAGE?
THE SAME APPLIES WHEN WE RELAY MESSAGES.
YES.
THAT BALDY RAT OVER THERE TELLS ME LIES ALL THE TIME.
FWA HA HA HA HA
THE DAY A *SUPPA* PASSES ALONG A LIE IS THE DAY HE DIES.
FWA HA HA HA HA.
HE COULD NEVER HAVE ENOUGH LIVES.

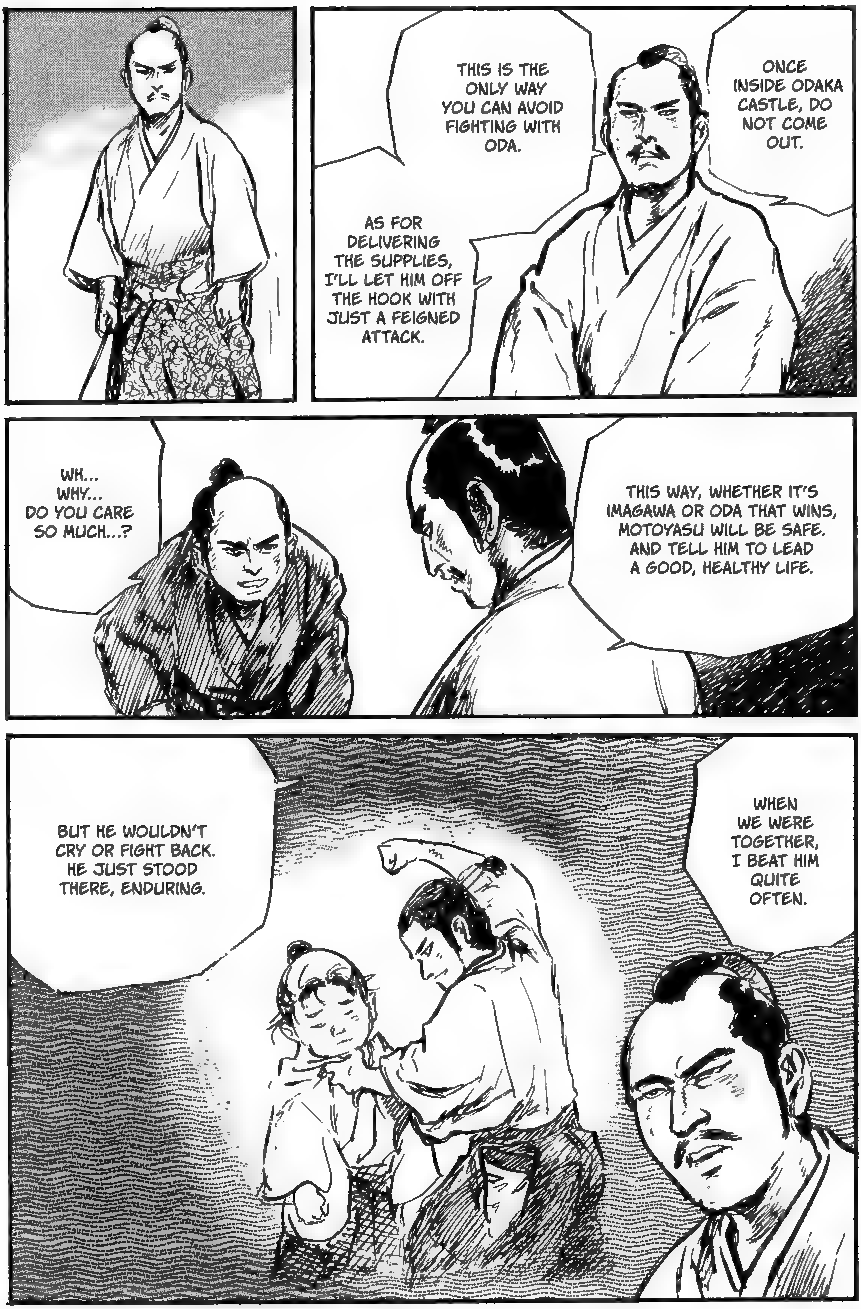
THUS, I SPECULATE ON WHAT IS LIKELY TO HAPPEN AND RELAY WHAT I SUSPECT. SOMETIMES MY GUESSWORK PROVES ME WRONG.
I'M AFRAID IT WILL BE TOO LATE IF I ONLY REPORT THE FACTS OF WHAT ARE HAPPENING AT THAT MOMENT. OPPORTUNITIES WILL BE LOST.
THAT IS FOR A GENERAL TO DETERMINE, NOT A *SUPPA*.
HA HA HA HA HA HA.
HANZŌ, YOU TOO MUST BE THAT WAY.
EVEN THOUGH HE IS A *SUPPA*, HE IS ALSO A COMMANDER OF ODA.
YOU'RE RIGHT. THIS BALDY RAT IS A *SUPPA*, BUT NOT A *SUPPA*.

LARGE EARS AND TIGHT LIPS.
NOW, WHAT MUST A COMMANDER HOLD IN HIS MIND EVERY DAY?
YES.
ALSO, ANY OTHER MAN'S INCH SHOULD BE HIS YARD A GENERAL MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER THESE CREDOS, I BELIEVE.
KEEP YOUR EARS WIDE OPEN, BUT NEVER SAY ANYTHING INDISCREET ALSO, TAKE ANOTHER MAN'S FAULT AS YOUR OWN AND AS YOUR WARNING.
THIS IS NOT SO EASY TO DO.

YES.
I HEAR HE CHANGED HIS NAME TO MOTOYASU.
NO WONDER THE BALDY RAT PLACED HIS CONFIDENCE IN YOU.
NEVER LEAVE MOTOYASU'S SIDE, HANZŌ.
SOMETIMES, I FEEL LIKE HE IS MY REAL BROTHER.
YES.
WHO KNOWS IF I'LL BE ABLE TO SEE HIM AGAIN.

IF HE PASSES UP THAT OPENING, THE RAINY SEASON WILL BE HERE. I'M PRETTY SURE MY HUNCH IS RIGHT.
THAT'S THE SORT OF MAN HE IS.
YOSHIMOTO WILL WAIT FOR THE BLUE FLAGS TO BLOOM, THEN HE'LL TAKE HIS TROOPS TO THE CAPITAL.
YES, SIR.
TELL MOTOYASU NOT TO SAIL IN THE SAME BOAT WITH YOSHIMOTO!
AND THAT MEANS, YOU'LL CLASH HEAD-ON WITH ODA.
YES, SIR.
TELL HIM TO VOLUNTEER FOR THE ADVANCE GROUP. UNDERSTAND?!

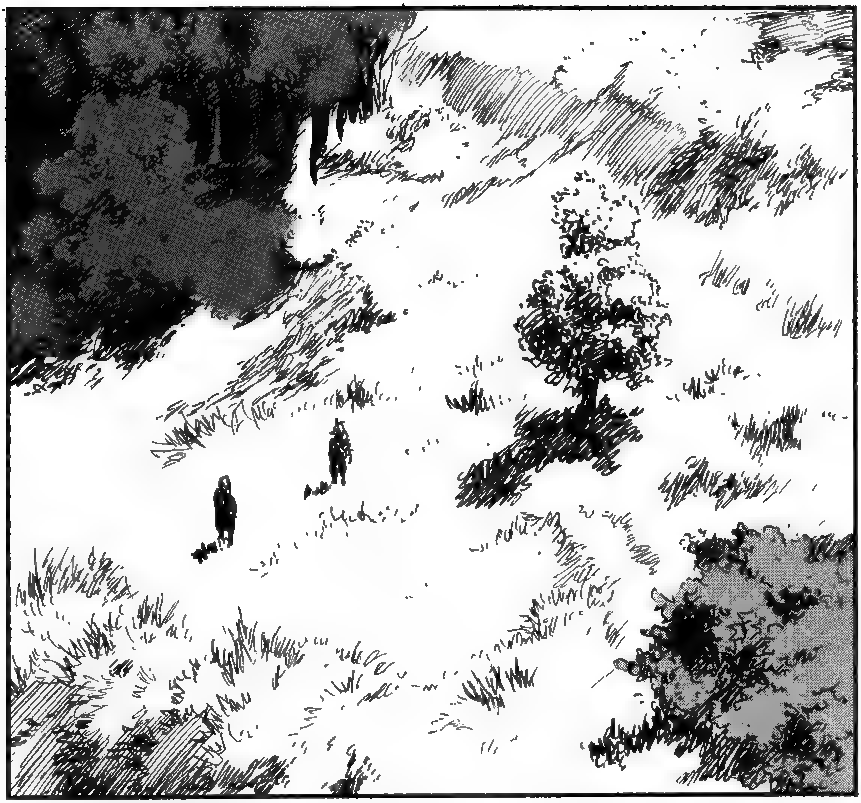
...AND YOSHIMOTO IS THE MAIN FORCE.
LET'S SAY MOTOYASU IS THE ADVANCE GROUP...
FLOP
ONCE YOSHIMOTO REACHES KUTSUKAKE, I BET HE'LL PUT HIS HEADQUARTERS THERE AND ATTEMPT TO DELIVER PROVISIONS TO ODAKA CASTLE.
BY THE TIME YOSHIMOTO REACHES KAKEGAWA, MOTOYASU WILL BE AT TENRYU RIVER. BY THE TIME YOSHIMOTO REACHES OKAZAKI, MOTOYASU WILL BE AT CHIRYU.
LISTEN, MOTOYASU SHOULD VOLUNTEER TO DELIVER THE PROVISIONS. IT'S A DANGEROUS TASK THAT EVERYONE ELSE WILL SHRINK FROM. NO DOUBT, THE ASSIGNMENT WILL BE GRANTED
CLOSE TO ATSUTA AND SITUATED DEEP INSIDE ODA TERRITORY, ODAKA CASTLE WILL DEFINITELY BE IMAGAWA'S FORWARD BASE.

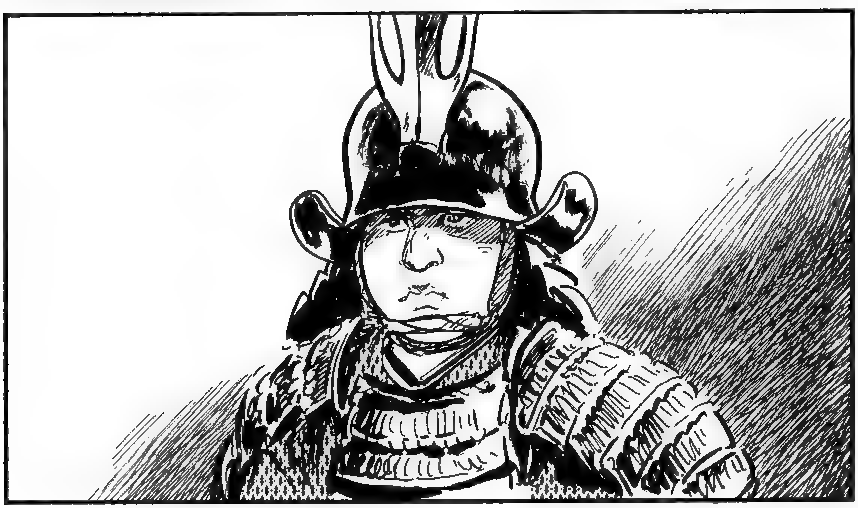

THIS IS THE ONLY WAY YOU CAN AVOID FIGHTING WITH ODA.
ONCE INSIDE ODAKA CASTLE, DO NOT COME OUT.
AS FOR DELIVERING THE SUPPLIES, I'LL LET HIM OFF THE HOOK WITH JUST A FEIGNED ATTACK.
WH... WHY... DO YOU CARE SO MUCH...?
THIS WAY, WHETHER IT'S IMAGAWA OR ODA THAT WINS, MOTOYASU WILL BE SAFE. AND TELL HIM TO LEAD A GOOD, HEALTHY LIFE.
BUT HE WOULDN'T CRY OR FIGHT BACK. HE JUST STOOD THERE, ENDURING.
WHEN WE WERE TOGETHER, I BEAT HIM QUITE OFTEN.

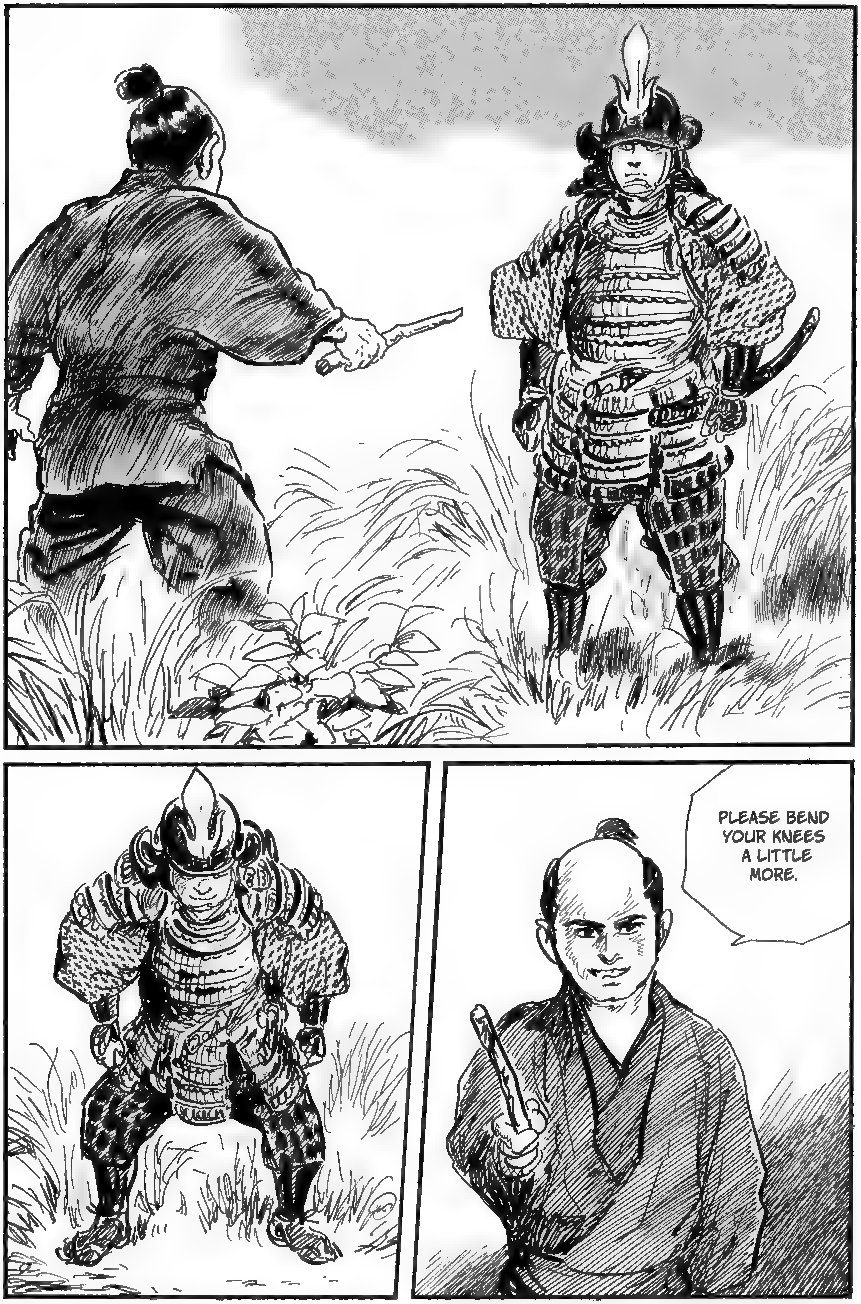
HENCE, I WILL NOT ATTACK HIM.
I FELT SORRY FOR HIM AND PROMISED THAT I'D NEVER STRIKE HIM AGAIN.
FOREVER.
IT'S A PROMISE.
WE'LL KNOW BY THE TIME A BLUE FLAG OR A RABBIT-EAR IRIS BLOSSOMS.
IMAGAWA OR ODA. WHICH WILL WIN?

Chapter On Relinquishing Factions

No. 6: Blue Flag and War






PLEASE BEND YOUR KNEES A LITTLE MORE.

HMM...
YES. WHERE ON YOUR FEET DO YOU FEEL YOUR BODY WEIGHT?
WEIGHT? YOU MEAN MY BODY WEIGHT?
WHICH PART OF YOUR SOLES FEELS YOUR WEIGHT?
THINK OF INSERTING A SHEET OF PAPER UNDER YOUR HEEL, AND WEIGHT YOUR BODY AROUND THE BASE OF YOUR TOES INSTEAD.
THAT WON'T HELP YOU BE AGILE.
WHOLE BACKSIDE.
THE BASE OF MY TOES, EH?

THAT WON'T DO. THINK OF KEEPING JUST ENOUGH SPACE THAT A SHEET OF PAPER MIGHT SLIP IN BENEATH YOUR HEEL.
YOU MEAN, STAND ON TIPTOE?
IS THIS GOOD?
WHEN YOUR HEELS ARE HUGGING THE EARTH, YOU'LL MOVE LIKE A COW.
EVEN MORE SO WHEN YOU'RE WEARING A HEAVY SUIT OF ARMOR.

LEFT... EH?! THIS WAY, THEN.
I WILL THRUST IT FORWARD, SO PLEASE DODGE TO THE LEFT AND ESCAPE.
NOW, THINK OF THIS STICK AS A *YOROIDOSHI*.
YES, SIDESTEP TOWARD YOUR LEFT ARM, MILORD.
READY?

ガバッ
SASHA!
PLEASE TRY THE RIGHT THEN.
DOES IT MATTER WHETHER I DODGE LEFT OR RIGHT?
THAT'S IT.

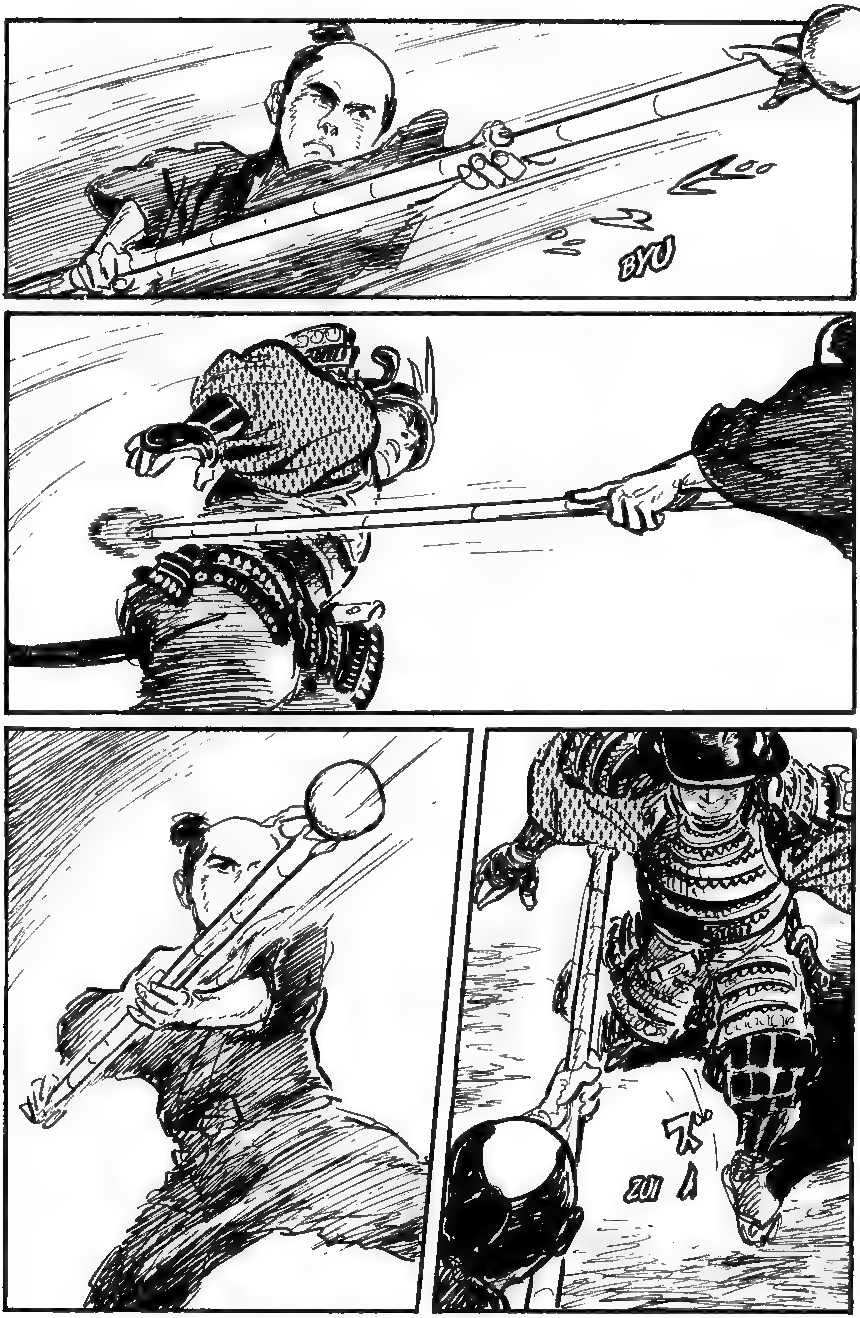
GASHAK
SHAK
AH!!

SWIP
A MAN'S RIGHT ARM CAN EASILY FOLLOW AN ENEMY WHO JUMPS IN THAT DIRECTION.
IF YOU DODGE TO THE RIGHT, IT'S EASY TO FOLLOW YOU.
...THE RIGHT ARM CANNOT TURN COMPLETELY.
BUT IF THE ENEMY MOVES TO THE LEFT...

HM/
INDEED.
THIS CREATES A CHANCE FOR ESCAPE
THAT MEANS YOU MUST REPOSITION YOURSELF BEFORE STRIKING AGAIN.
ジャキ
GROWL

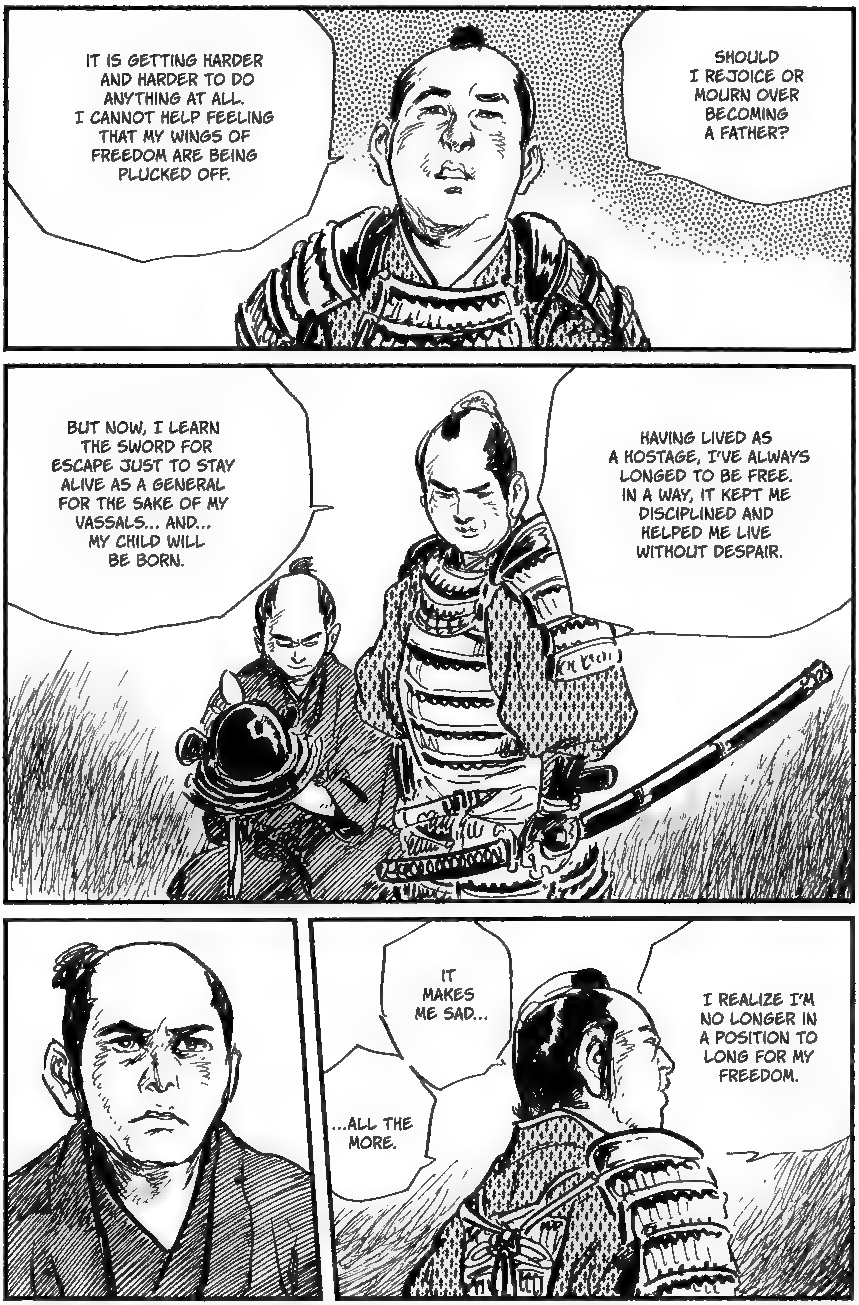
MMM!
IF YOU DO, IT WILL FOLLOW YOU.
NEVER STEP BACK TO DODGE A SPEAR.
YOU MUST MOVE FORWARD. AS YOU DODGE LEFT, YOU MUST LUNGE TOWARD YOUR ENEMY.

WHEN YOU DO, MOVE AS IF TO JAM THE SPEAR BETWEEN YOUR ARM AND YOUR SIDE.
THAT ALSO STANDS TO REASON.
HMPH!
THAT GIVES YOU YOUR CHANCE.
AND BECAUSE THE SPEAR IS LONG, WHEN YOU STEP FORWARD, THE ENEMY WILL HAVE TO PULL BACK.


BYU

BYO
EXCELLENT!

ESPECIALLY SINCE IN YOUR CASE, MILORD, ALL YOU NEED TO FOCUS ON IS TO SURVIVE, RATHER THAN TO KILL EACH ENEMY. PLEASE KEEP THIS IN MIND AND REMEMBER TO PRACTICE YOUR REACTIONS.
A SUIT OF ARMOR IS HEAVY. WHETHER YOU WIN OR LOSE WILL HINGE ON HOW INTELLIGENTLY YOU MOVE.
A CHILD WILL BE BORN, HANZÔ.
YES.
MY SWORD IS ONLY A SWORD FOR ESCAPE, EH?
...WHO HAS TO LEARN THE SWORD FOR ESCAPE.
ANOTHER GENERAL WILL BE BORN TO THIS WORLD...
MY WIFE IS PREGNANT.


IT IS GETTING HARDER AND HARDER TO DO ANYTHING AT ALL. I CANNOT HELP FEELING THAT MY WINGS OF FREEDOM ARE BEING PLUCKED OFF.
SHOULD I REJOICE OR MOURN OVER BECOMING A FATHER?
BUT NOW, I LEARN THE SWORD FOR ESCAPE JUST TO STAY ALIVE AS A GENERAL FOR THE SAKE OF MY VASSALS... AND... MY CHILD WILL BE BORN.
HAVING LIVED AS A HOSTAGE, I'VE ALWAYS LONGED TO BE FREE. IN A WAY, IT KEPT ME DISCIPLINED AND HELPED ME LIVE WITHOUT DESPAIR.
IT MAKES ME SAD...
...ALL THE MORE.
I REALIZE I'M NO LONGER IN A POSITION TO LONG FOR MY FREEDOM.

MOTOYASU, DO YOU WANT TO GO BACK TO OKAZAKI?

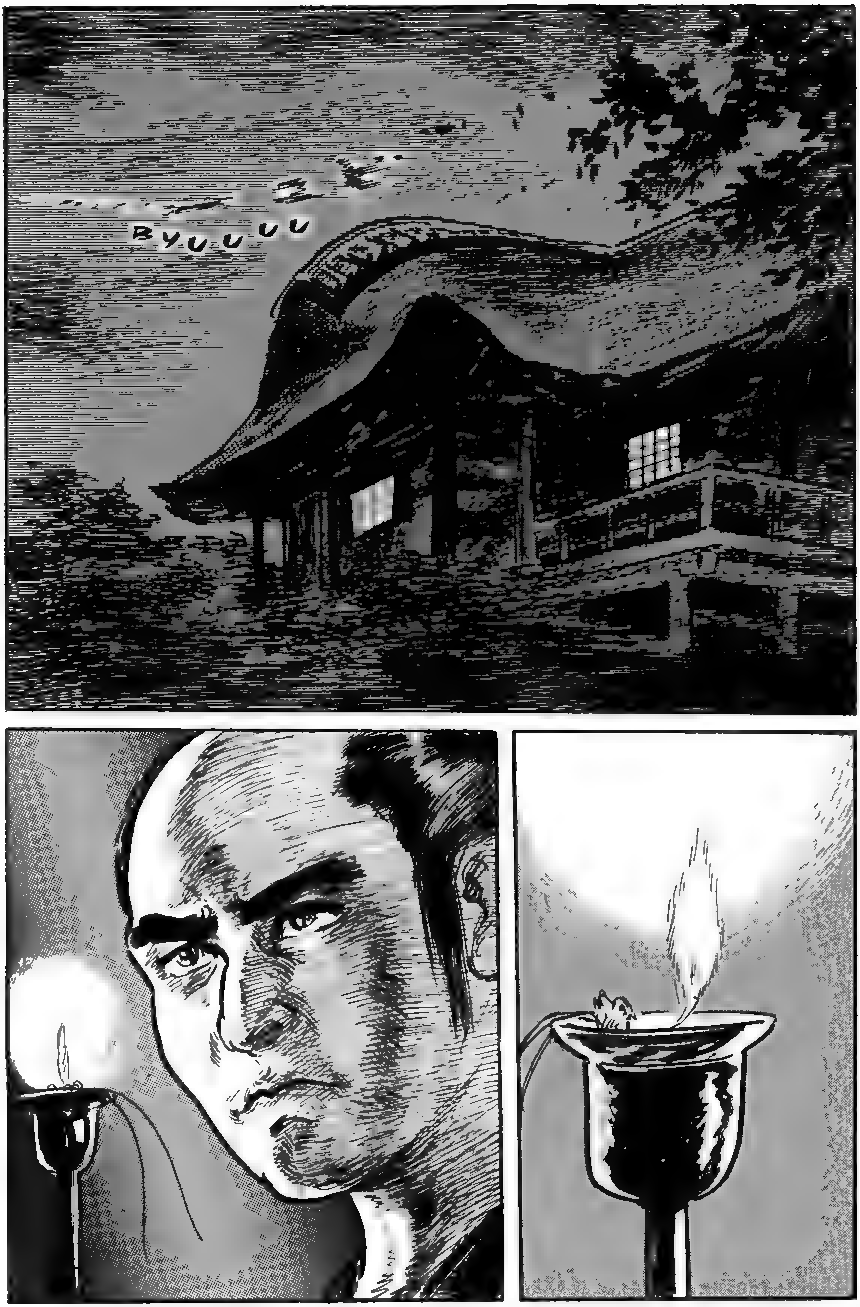
I WILL ANSWER WHEN THE BLUE FLAGS BLOSSOM.
WHY DO YOU NOT ANSWER?
BECAUSE WE'LL ENTER THE RAINY SEASON.
WHY IS THAT?
HM!!

OYAKATA-SAMA, IF YOU ARE TO WAGE WAR AGAINST THE CAPITAL, IT WILL BE BEFORE THE RAINY SEASON.
SO WHAT IF WE ENTER THE RAINY SEASON?
WHY NOT AFTER THE RAINY SEASON?
GWA HA HA HA HA HA HA.

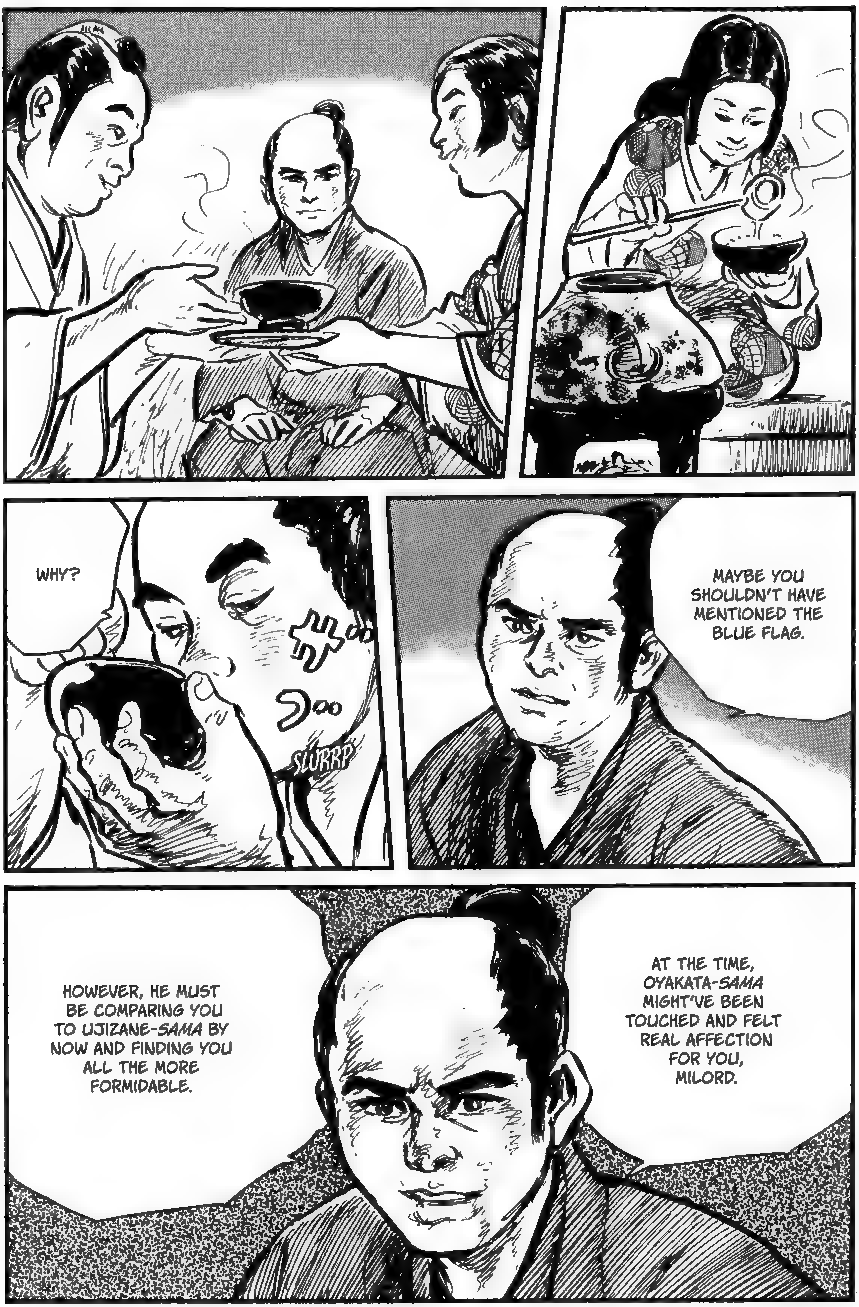
THEN IT'S WINTER AFTER VICTORY, AND WINTER AFTER DEFEAT.
WHAT ABOUT AUTUMN?
TO STOP FOR WATER AGAIN AND AGAIN, CARRYING EXTRA CASKETS AND WAGONS, WILL ONLY EXHAUST THE TROOPS TO NO PURPOSE.
IT WILL BE TOO HOT.
KAI WON'T COME OUT, AND ECHIZEN WON'T BE ABLE TO MOVE.
IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO SUPPORT THE TROOPS FOR THE FOLLOWING BATTLES.
BUT IF IT'S BEFORE RAINY SEASON, IT WILL RAIN WHETHER IT'S VICTORY OR DEFEAT. THAT WILL MAKE IT EASIER TO QUENCH THE FIRE OF WAR
WHOEVER FOLLOWS ON THAT MUDDY TRAIL, ONLY REACTING TO THE FIRST, WON'T BE ABLE TO MAKE IT THROUGH
THE ONE WHO HITS THE ROAD BEFORE IT TURNS MUDDY WILL PROVE THE WINNER.

...I CANNOT LEAVE YOUR SIDE, OYAKATA-SAMA, BEFORE THE BLUE FLAGS BLOSSOM.
HENCE...
YES, SIR.
MOTOYASU.
BLUE FLAG IS A FLOWER OF CONTEST INDEED. IT BLOOMS AT THE CROSSROADS OF BATTLE.
ONCE I COME TO POWER, I'LL GRANT YOU ANY TERRITORY YOU WISH.

HA HA HA HA HA HA.
SO, THE FLOWER. LOOK AT IT EVERY MORNING.
EXCEPT KYOTO, THAT IS. HA HA HA HA HA.
PAT


Byuuuu

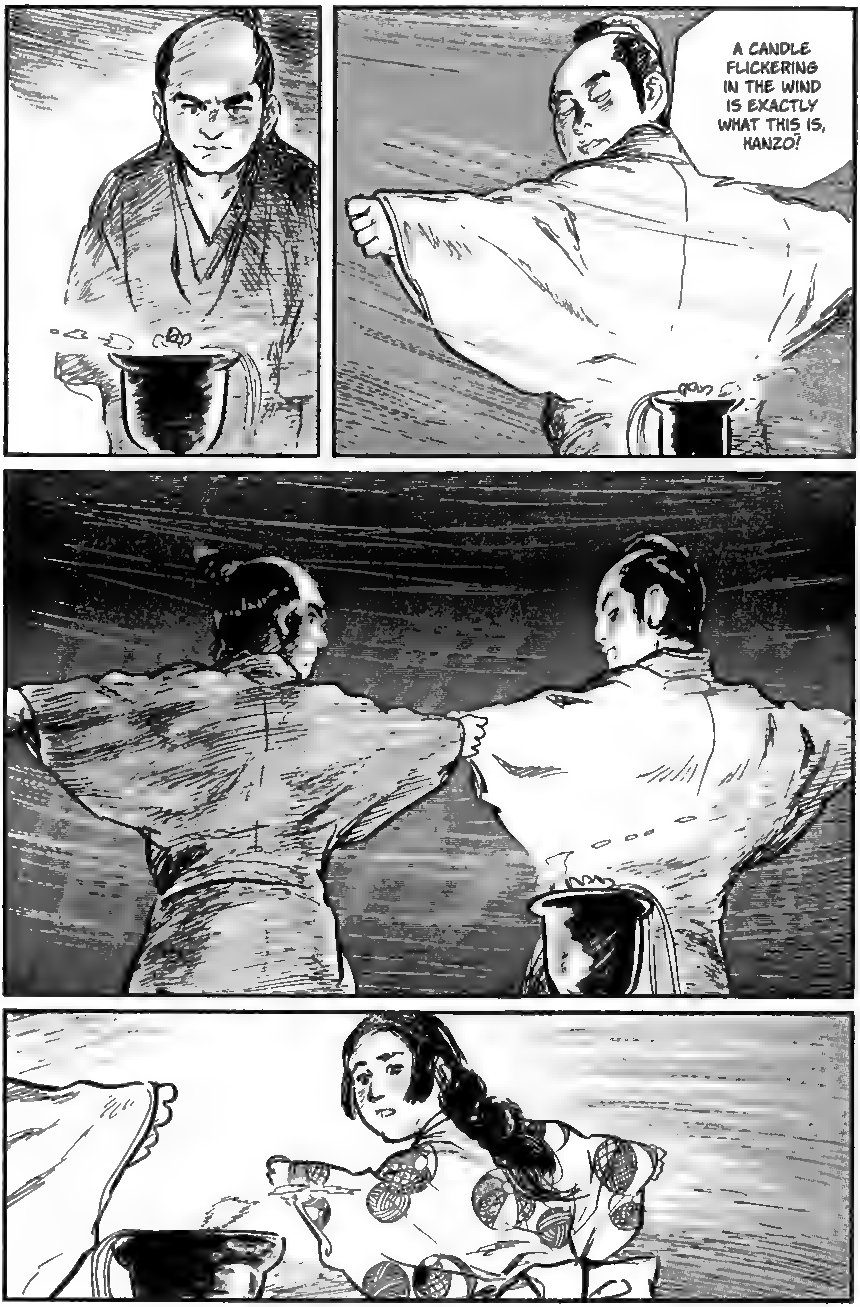
AND I TOO...
UH-HUH.
OYAKATA-SAMA... HAS SHED TEARS...?
MUNCH
IF I HAD A FATHER, I THOUGHT THAT'S WHAT IT MIGHT BE LIKE.
I SENSED SOMETHING PATERNAL IN HIM.
SURP
...FELT THEM WELLING UP.

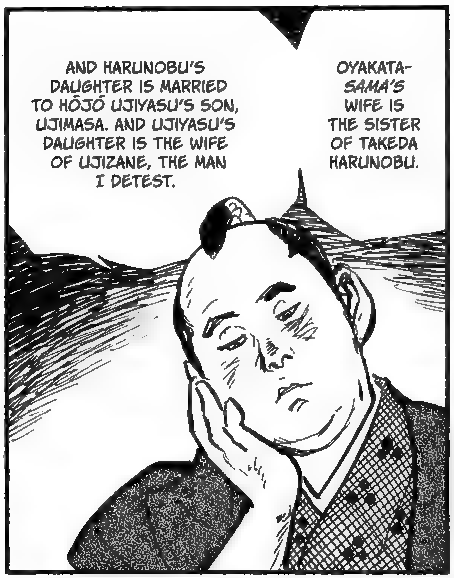

WHY?
SLURRP
MAYBE YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE MENTIONED THE BLUE FLAG.
HOWEVER, HE MUST BE COMPARING YOU TO UJIZANE-SAMA BY NOW AND FINDING YOU ALL THE MORE FORMIDABLE.
AT THE TIME, OYAKATA-SAMA MIGHT'VE BEEN TOUCHED AND FELT REAL AFFECTION FOR YOU, MILORD.

AFTER ALL, UJIZANE AND I ARE INCOMPATIBLE. AND HE KNOWS THAT ALL MEN FROM OKAZAKI HAVE A GRUDGE AGAINST IMAGAWA. NO MATTER HOW WE CUT IT, HE WOULD, INDEED.
INDEED, HE WOULD, WOULDN'T HE?
THAT'S FINE, ISN'T IT? LET HIM THINK OF ME AS FORMIDABLE UPON CONTEMPLATING IMAGAWA'S FUTURE AND COMPARING ME WITH UJIZANE.
AND THAT MEANS, OYAKATA-*SAMA* WILL PUT ME IN THE VERY FRONT.
BECAUSE AT HEART HE WISHES ME TO DIE.
AND ASK ME TO DELIVER THE PROVISIONS TO ODAKA CASTLE.

WHY NOT? NOBUNAGA-DONO, WHO REGARDS ME AS HIS BROTHER, TOOK THE TROUBLE TO TELL ME ABOUT IT, SO WHY NOT?
I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR A CHANCE TO MENTION IT.
THAT'S... THAT'S WHY YOU TOLD HIM OF THE BLUE FLAG...?
SANDWICHED BETWEEN THE TWO, I WONDER WHAT MY TOMORROW HOLDS.
A TIGER OF A FATHER AND A WOLF OF A BROTHER
YES?!
HANZŌ, LET'S READ MY FORTUNE.
I CAN'T LET THEM KILL ME.

OPEN THE DOOR AND LET THE WIND BLOW ON THE STAND OF THE ISH


A CANDLE FLICKERING IN THE WIND IS EXACTLY WHAT THIS IS, KANZO!


AND HARUNOBU'S DAUGHTER IS MARRIED TO HŌJŌ UJIYASU'S SON, UJIMASA. AND UJIYASU'S DAUGHTER IS THE WIFE OF UJIZANE, THE MAN I DETEST.
OYAKATA-SAMA'S WIFE IS THE SISTER OF TAKEDA HARUNOBU.

URMM.

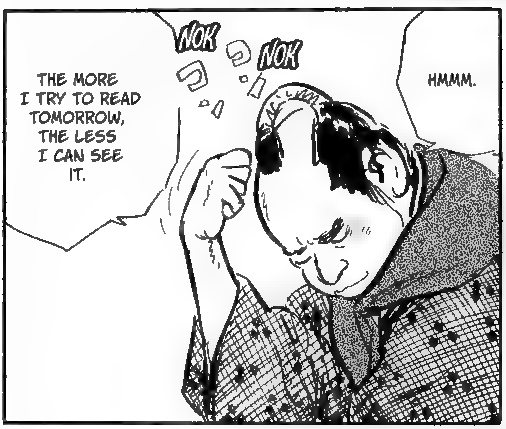
WHAT BROUGHT THESE THREE TO COME TOGETHER IS...

UMM...

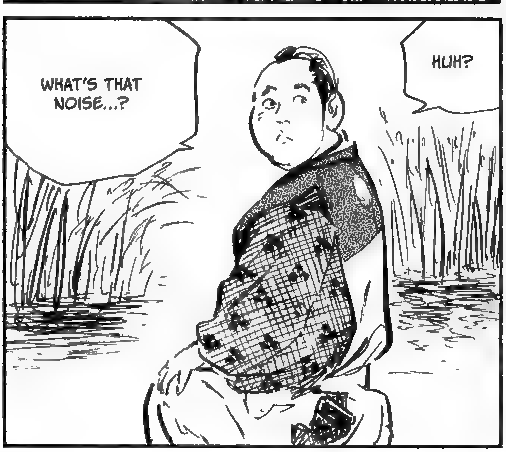
BASICALLY, THE UNION OF KAI, SUNPU, AND SAGAMI ARE BASED ON MATRIMONIAL ALLIANCES THAT ESTABLISHED THEIR NON-AGGRESSION PACTS. THEY ARE CERTAINLY FRIENDLY AND WILLING TO HELP ONE ANOTHER.

BESIDES, BEHIND ALL OF THEM ARE THE SAME OLD ENEMIES, ODA AND NAGAO. SO, THEY COWER EVEN MORE.
IF HŌJŌ ATTACKS IMAGAWA, TAKEDA WILL INDEED TAKE ADVANTAGE.
THEIR FEAR, I GUESS. IF IMAGAWA ATTACKS HŌJŌ, TAKEDA WILL STRIKE IN THEIR ABSENCE.
IF TAKEDA MAKES THE FIRST MOVE, IT'S THE SAME.
BUT IF IMAGAWA TAKES ACTION AND BRINGS WAR UPON THE CAPITAL, I WONDER WHAT TAKEDA AND HŌJŌ WILL DO. AND WHAT ABOUT ECHIGO AND ECHIZEN...?
HM.
THEY SHARE COMMON INTERESTS, AND THEY CAN'T TAKE ANY REAL INITIATIVE, THUS THEY UNITE...

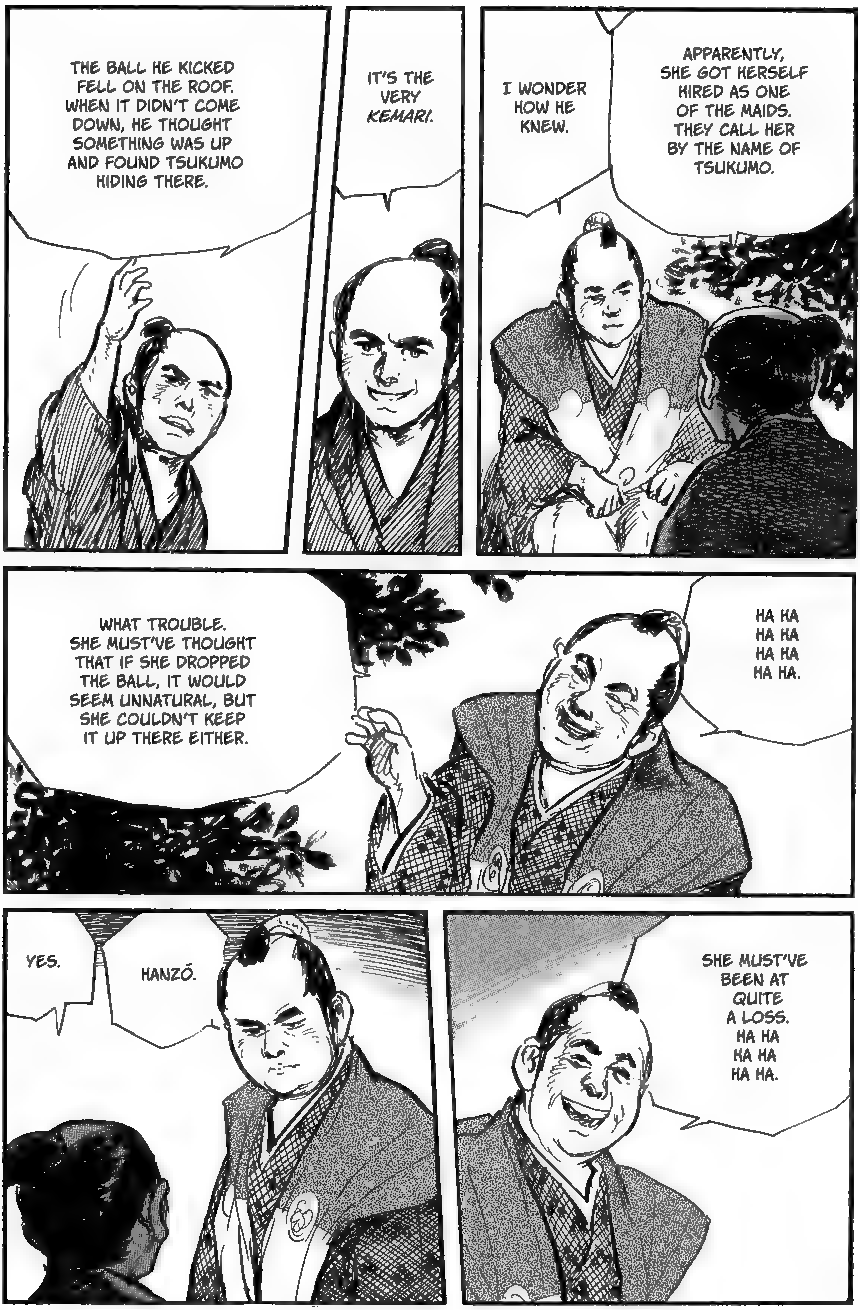
BUT IF IT'S BEFORE THEN...
ONCE THE RAINY SEASON HITS, NO ONE WOULD OR COULD GO ON THE MARCH.


THE MORE I TRY TO READ TOMORROW, THE LESS I CAN SEE IT.
NOK
NOK
HMMM.

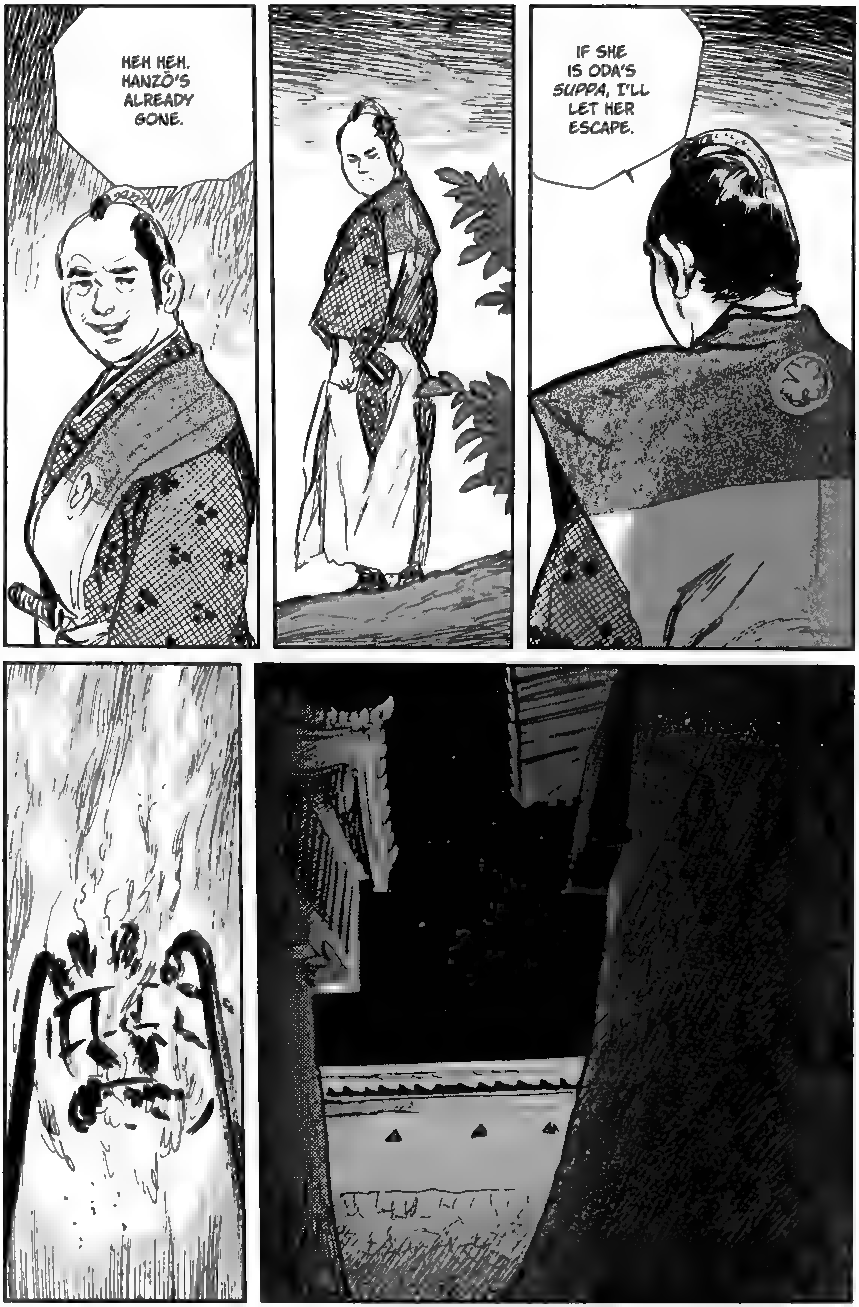
I SUPPOSE OYAKATA-SAMA HAS DETERMINED THAT THE FRIENDSHIP WITH TAKEDA IS STABLE ENOUGH AND THE PEACE WITH HŌJŌ IS ESTABLISHED....


WHAT'S THAT NOISE...?
HUH?

UJIZANE-SAMA HAS CAPTURED A FEMALE SUPPA.
YES, MILORD.
WHAT'S THE MATTER? DID SOMETHING HAPPEN?
HOW DID A MAN, WHOSE SOLE TALENT IS TO KICK A BALL, ACCOMPLISH SUCH A THING...?
A FEMALE SUPPA?
WHAT?!


THE BALL HE KICKED FELL ON THE ROOF. WHEN IT DIDN'T COME DOWN, HE THOUGHT SOMETHING WAS UP AND FOUND TSUKUMO HIDING THERE.
IT'S THE VERY KEMARI.
I WONDER HOW HE KNEW.
APPARENTLY, SHE GOT HERSELF HIRED AS ONE OF THE MAIDS. THEY CALL HER BY THE NAME OF TSUKUMO.
WHAT TROUBLE. SHE MUST'VE THOUGHT THAT IF SHE DROPPED THE BALL, IT WOULD SEEM UNNATURAL, BUT SHE COULDN'T KEEP IT UP THERE EITHER.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
YES.
HANZŌ.
SHE MUST'VE BEEN AT QUITE A LOSS. HA HA HA HA HA HA.

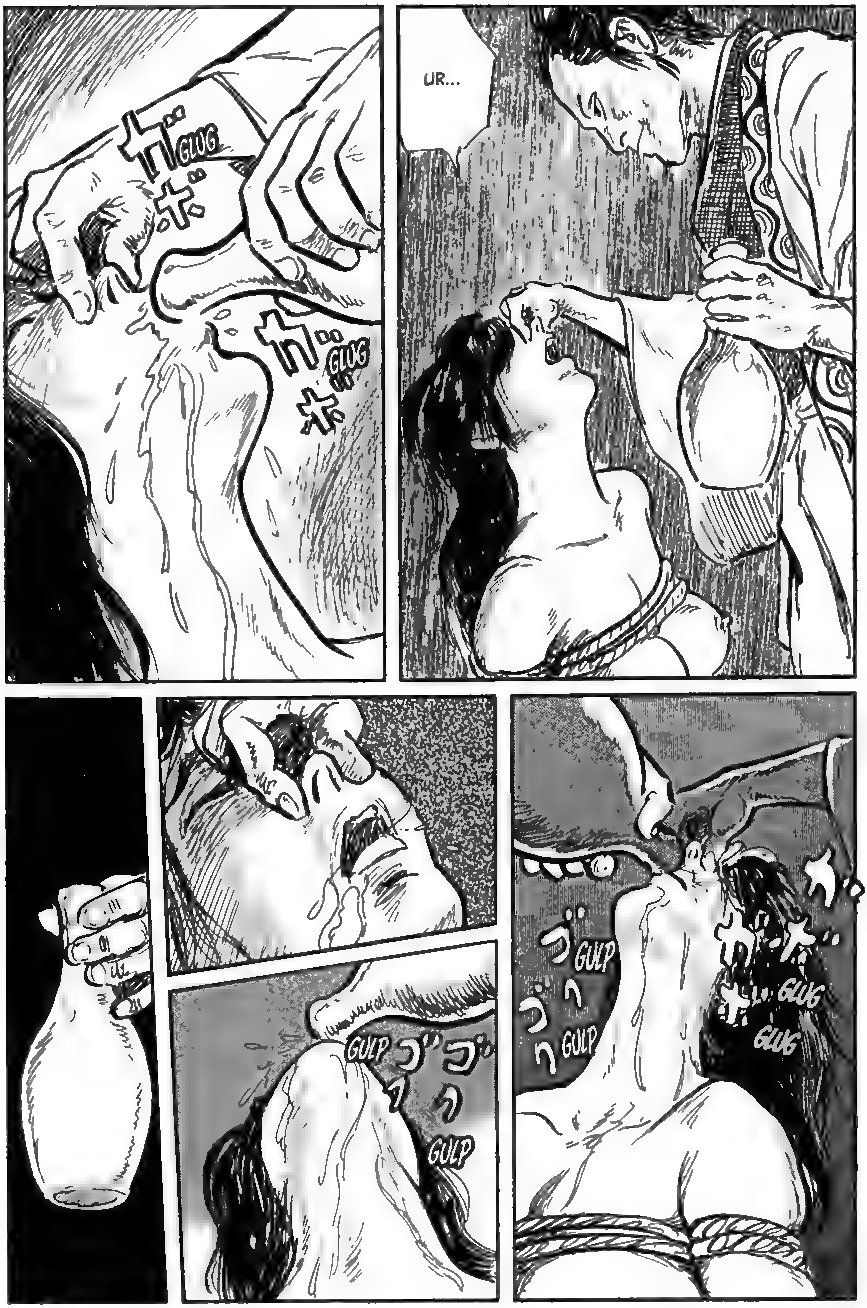
YES, MILORD.
UNDER-STAND?
THERE'S NO NEED TO SEEK PERMISSION FROM UJIZANE. I DON'T CARE HOW YOU DO IT.
BRING THE WOMAN TO ME.
BESIDES, I CAN'T HAVE A MAN LIKE HIM ACT SMUG ANYMORE.
I DON'T LIKE IT.
UJIZANE IS VERY CRUEL. I'M SURE HE'LL TRY TO MAKE HER TALK BY MOLESTING HER.
ALSO, BY LEARNING WHO SENT HER, I MIGHT BE ABLE TO READ THE FUTURE BETTER.
I MUST KNOW WHO SHE IS BEFORE UJIZANE DOES.


HEH HEH. HANZŌ'S ALREADY GONE.
IF SHE IS ODA'S *SUPPA*, I'LL LET HER ESCAPE.

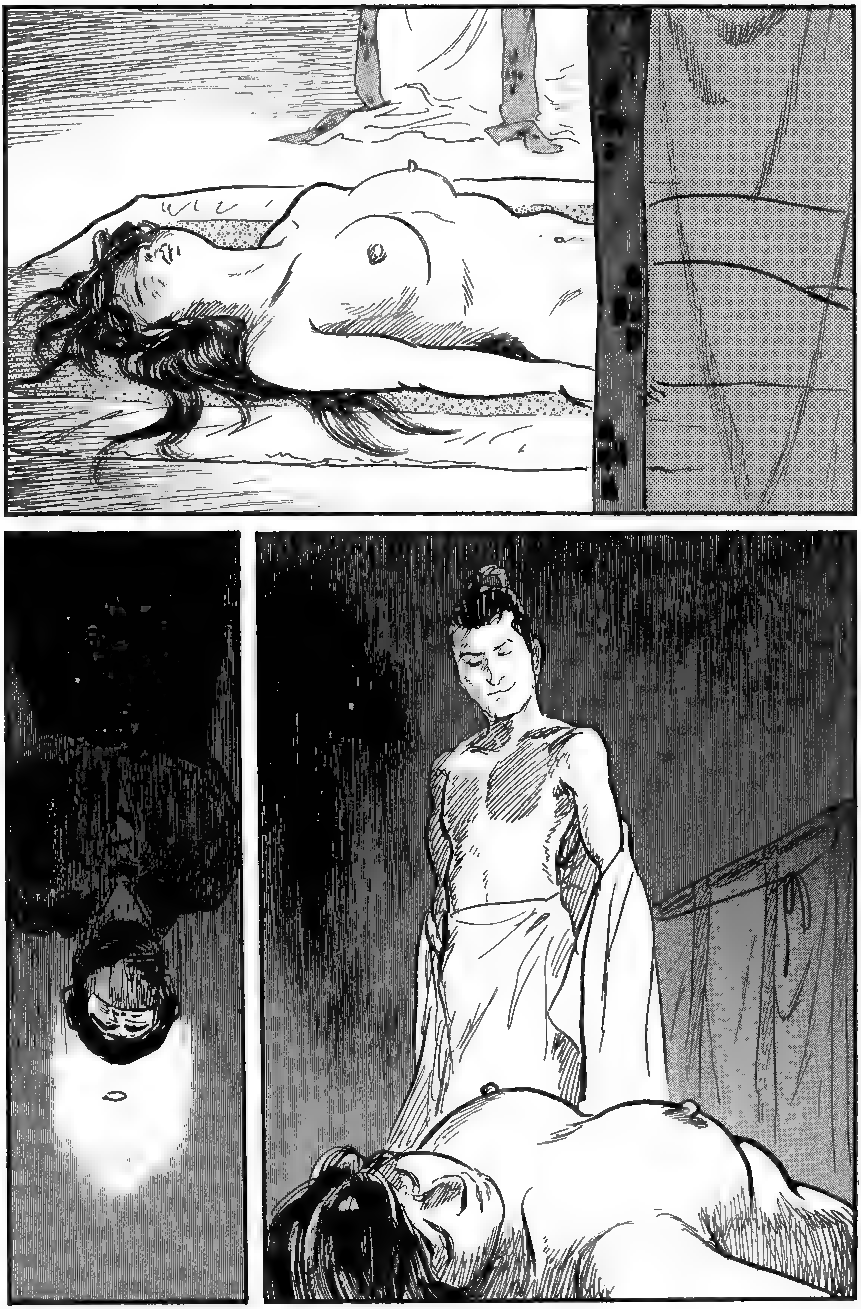
BAN
BANGU!!

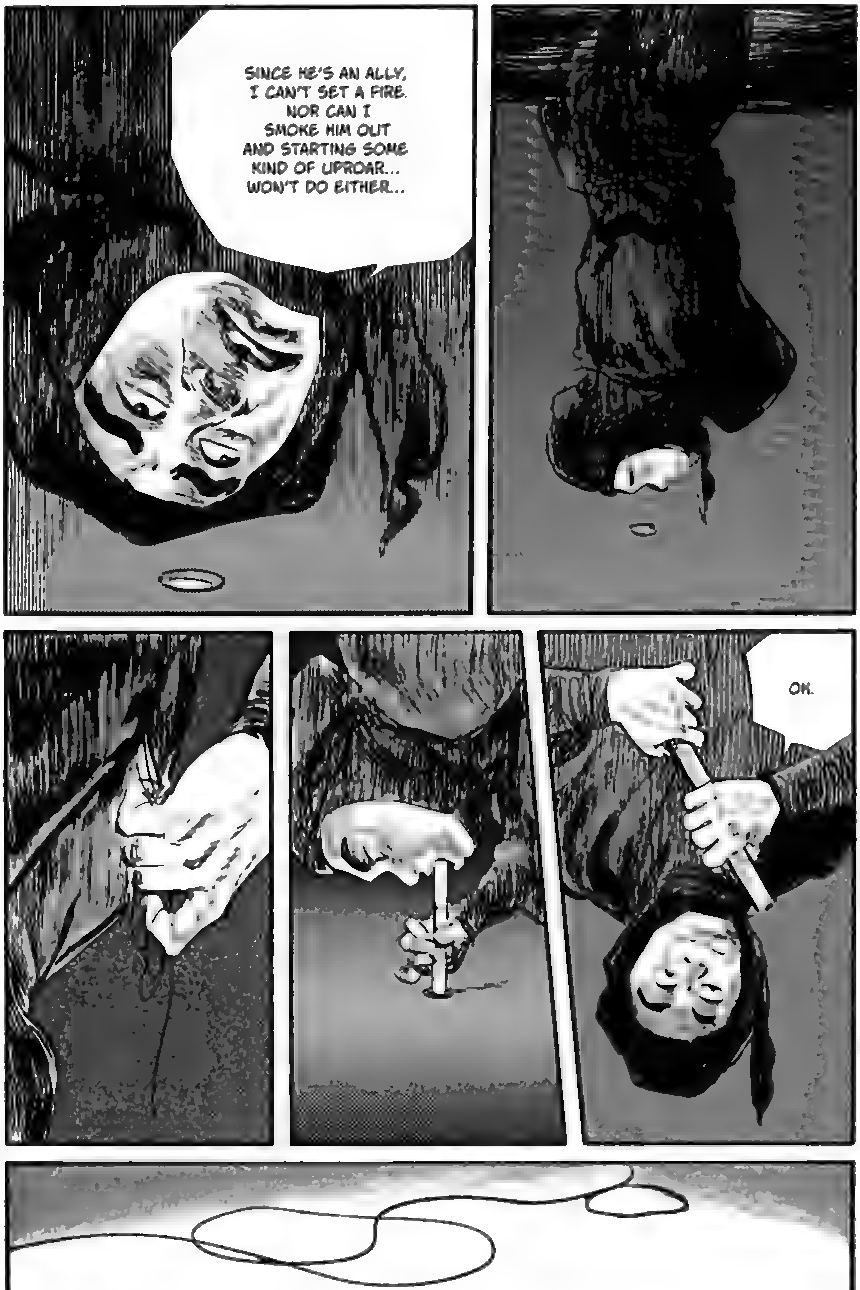
BAN
PON
BASH!
BAN

BASHI
URRK.

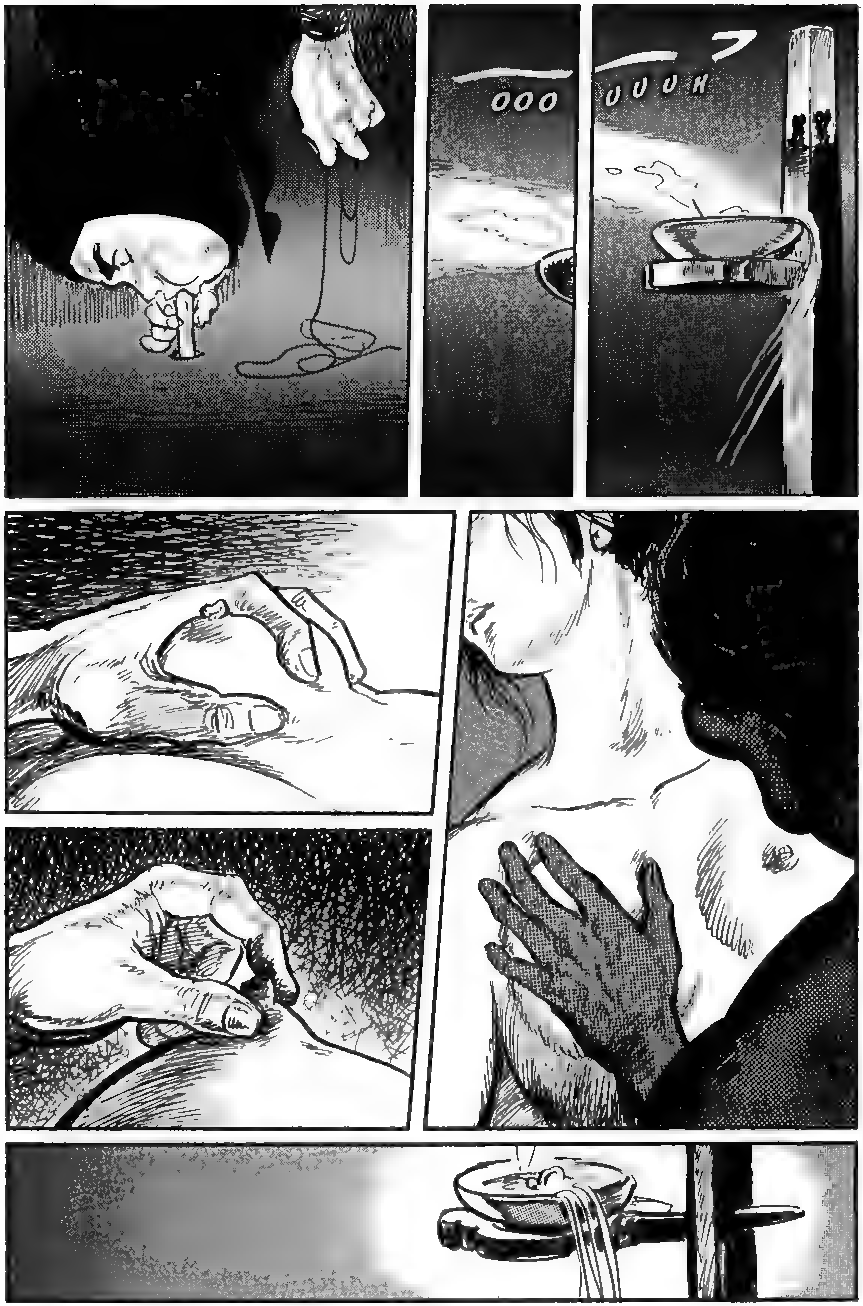

GLUG
GLUG
UR...
GULP
GULP
GULP
GULP
GLUG
GLUG

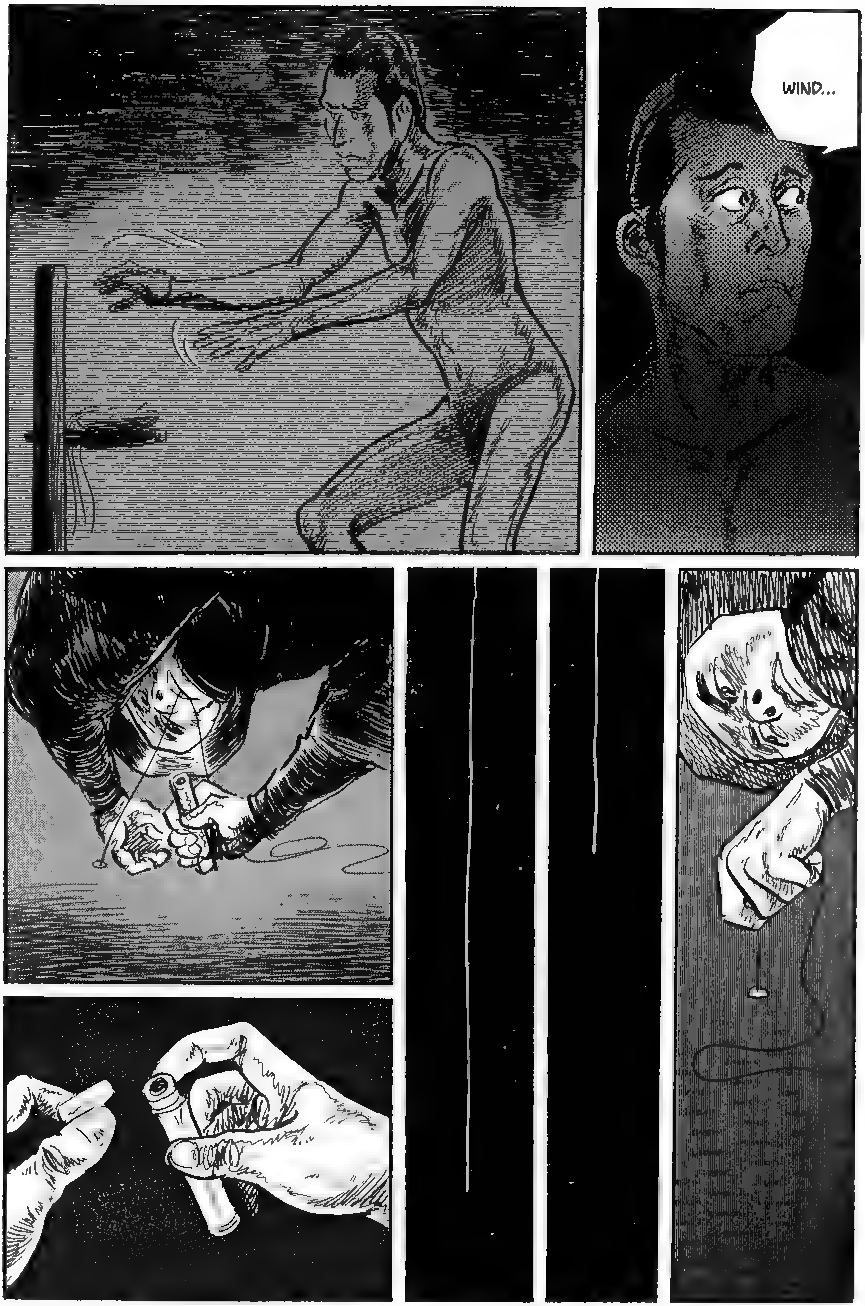
GOOD! UNBIND HER AND BRING HER TO MY SLEEPING QUARTERS.

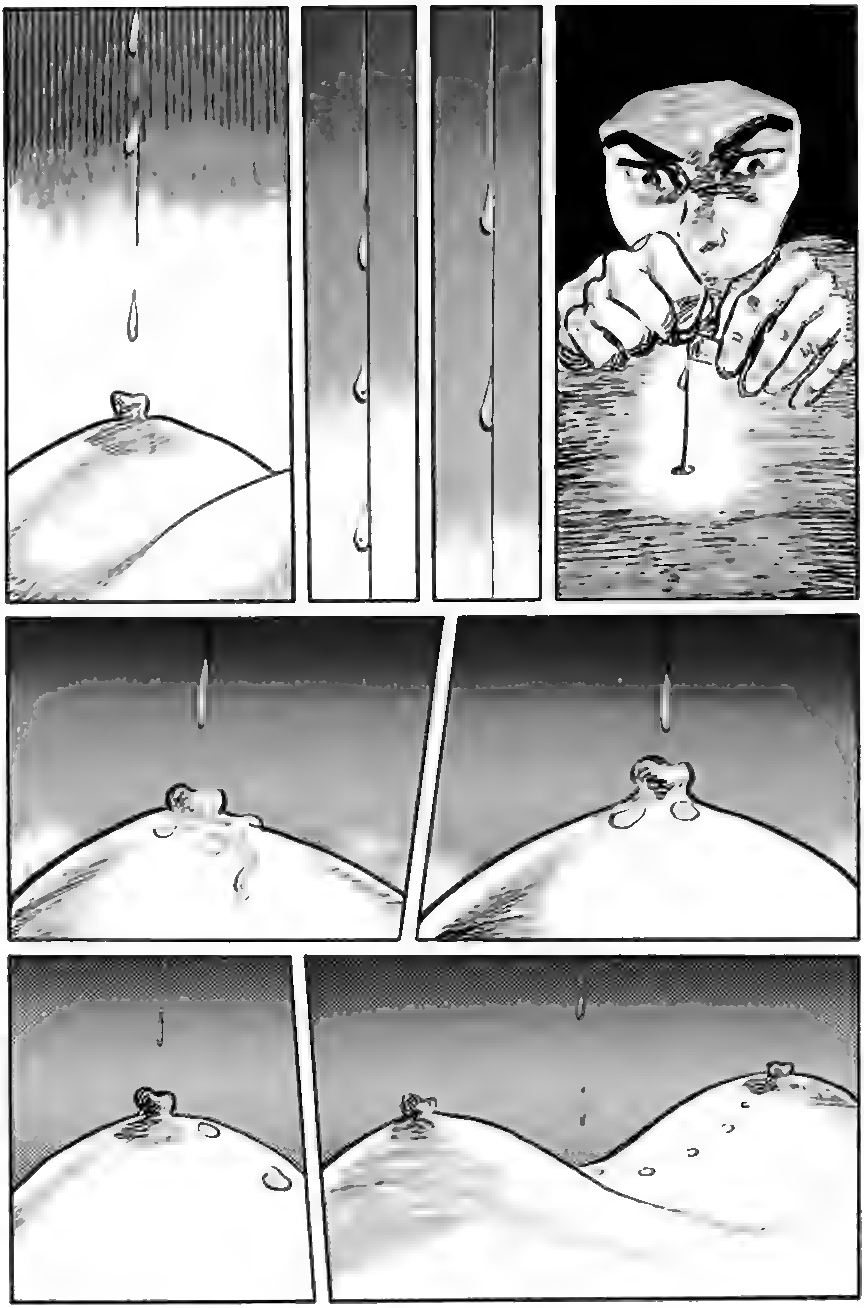


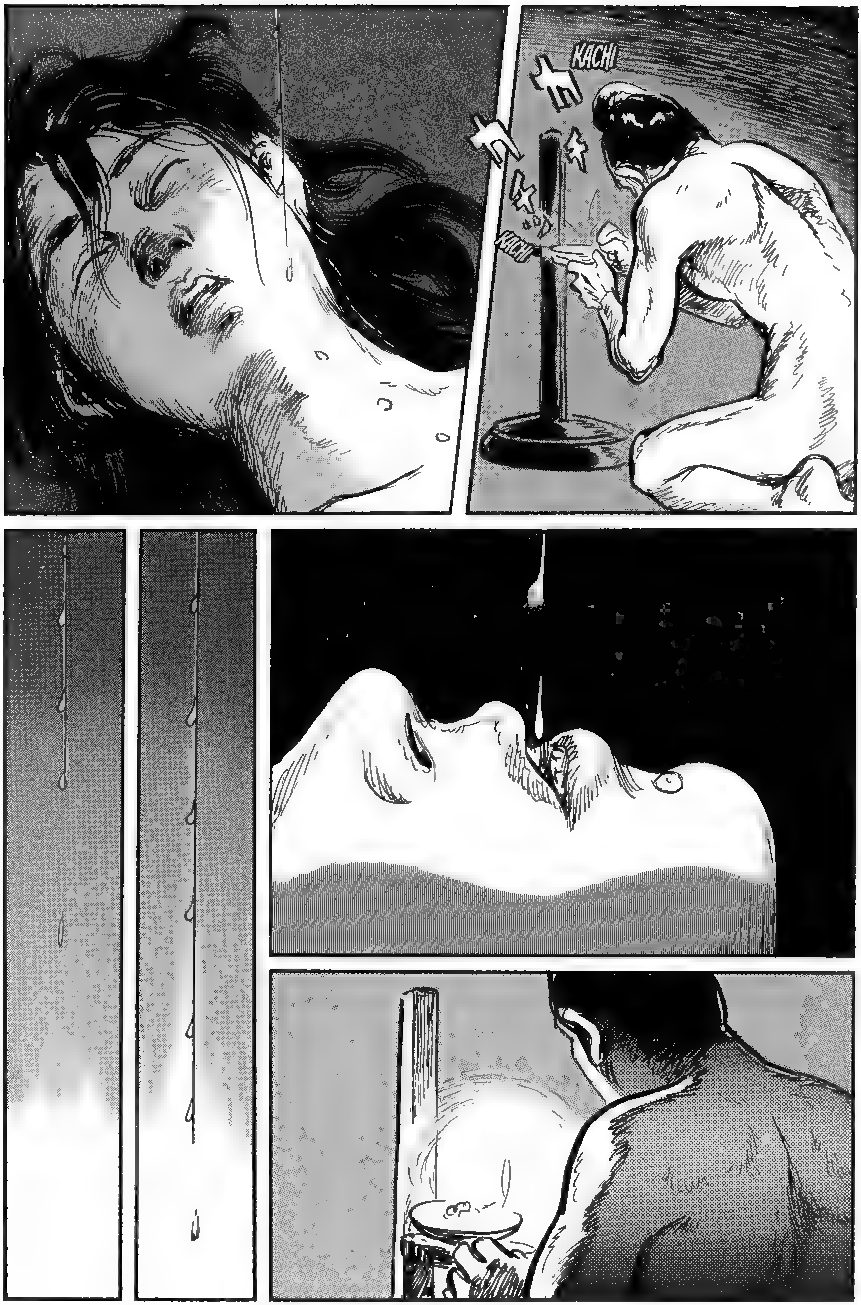

SINCE HE'S AN ALLY, I CAN'T SET A FIRE. NOR CAN I SMOKE HIM OUT AND STARTING SOME KIND OF UPROAR... WON'T DO EITHER...
OH.

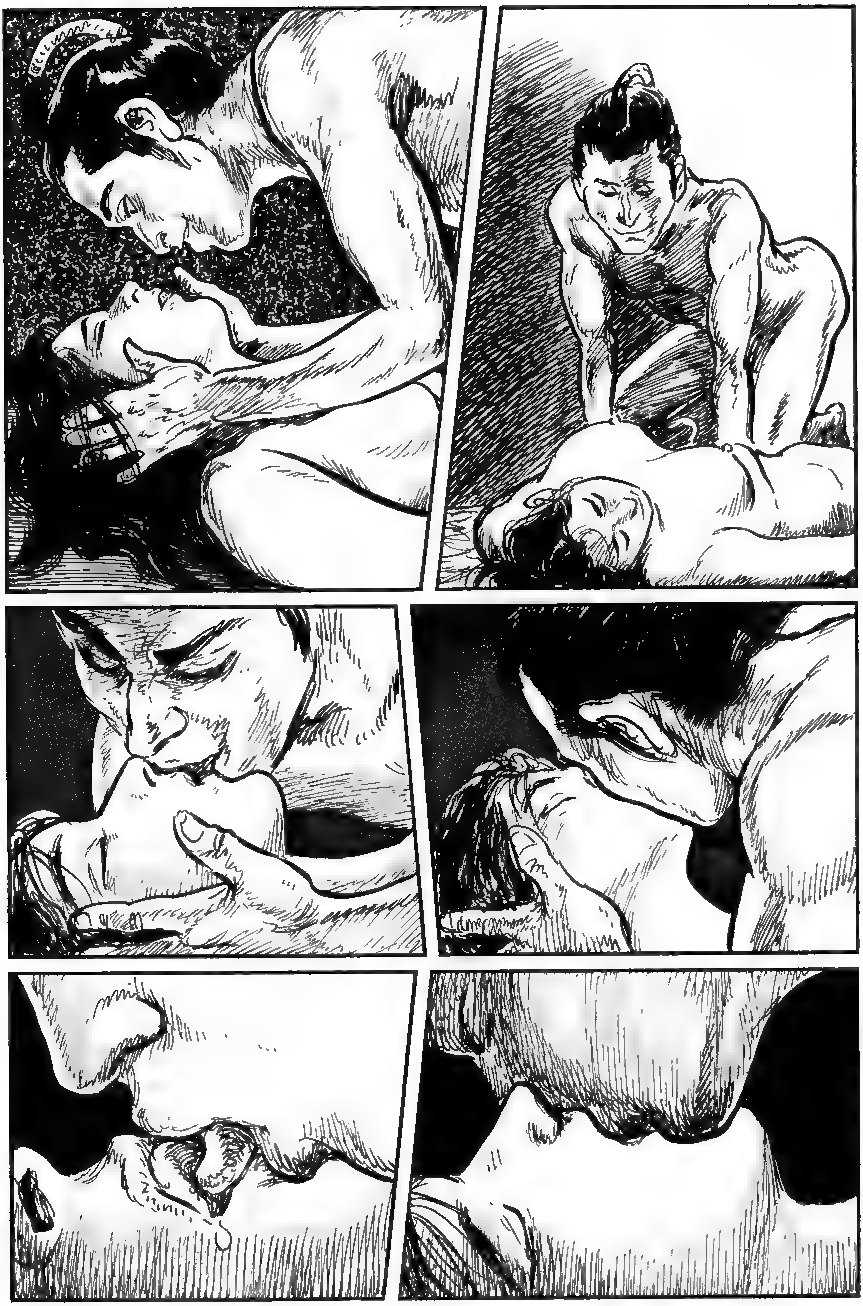
HEH HEH HEH.
WHAT BEAUTY FOR A SUPPA.


OOO
UUUH


WIND...



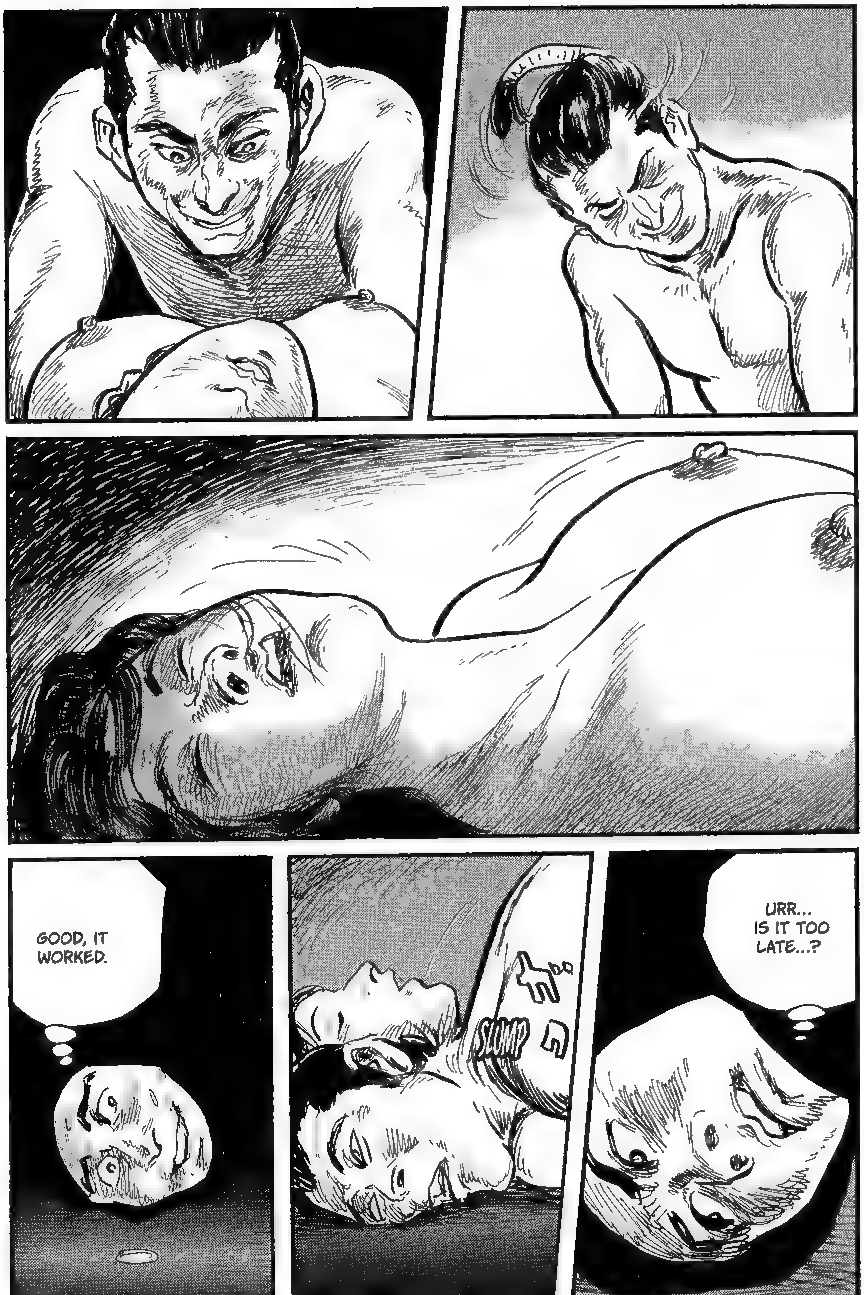

KACHI



HMMM...
THIS IS THE SORT OF SKIN THAT BELONGS TO A KID. SHE'S TRAINED JUST ABOUT RIGHT. SLENDER AND PRETTY.

UNWITTINGLY, HANZŌ COULD NOT HELP LUST OVER HER. HE HAD NEVER FELT THIS WAY BEFORE.
SO BEAUTIFUL...
INDEED, JUST AS UJIZANE DESCRIBED, THE WOMAN HAD UNBELIEVABLY FINE SKIN. BOTH HER SKIN AND MUSCLE LOOKED SUPPLE AND WELL TRAINED.
URRG. IT'S NOT WORKING... COME ON... IT MUST TAKE EFFECT... NOW...
HE MIGHT BE A *NINJA*, BUT STILL HE WAS HARDLY TWENTY.

SPAT
MY HEAD... FEELS HEAVY.
UH .


GOOD, IT WORKED.
SLUMP
URR... IS IT TOO LATE...?

UNDENIABLY
A MAN
WHAT
WHAT HE
HAS DO
LAO

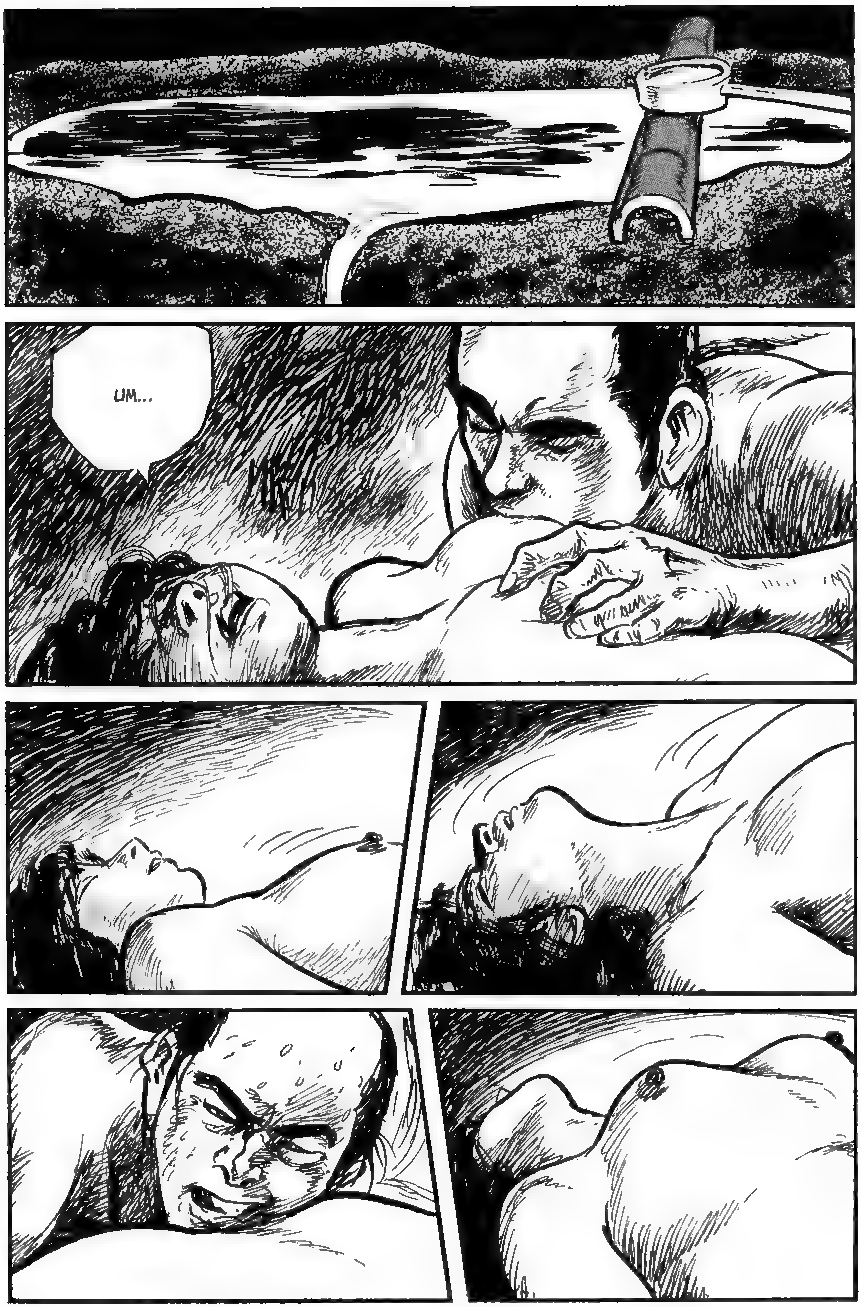
FILTH!
WHO THAT WOMAN

UH...

MMG...
AH...
GULP
GULP

I WILL NOT BE A BEAST.
URK...
I... I...
PLSSSH

AHH...
SPLASH
SPLASH


UM...

ДННН
ЗУЭННН

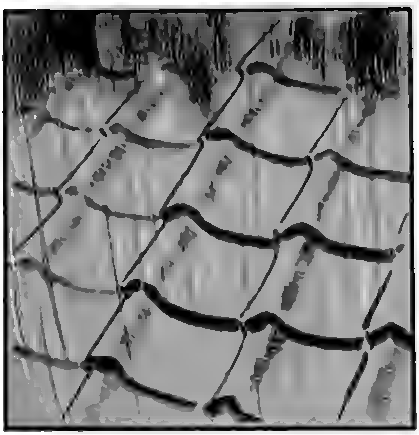
NOOO!
NOOO!
JUST A LITTLE...
JU... JUST A LITTLE... MORE.
I'LL... I'LL PULL OUT... SO WAIT.
NOOO
H... HOLD IT.
AWW.
URK...
IT... WON'T COME OUT.
URR... URG... AW... AWW...

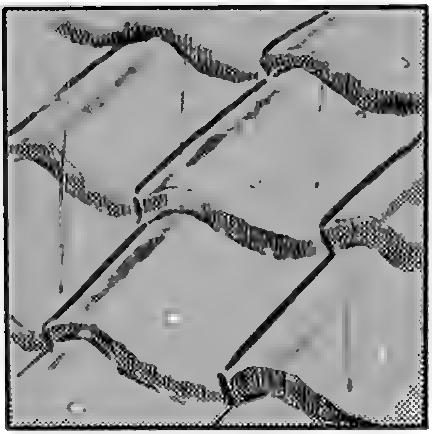
RE... RELAX YOUR HIP. PLEASE.
OTHERWISE... I CAN'T... SEPARATE FROM YOU.
P... PLEASE... RELAX.

I CAN'T.
GET... GET OFF!
P... PLEASE.
I... I RESCUED YOU.
YOU'RE PUNISHED FOR RAPING AN UNCONSCIOUS WOMAN.
I CAN'T PULL OUT.

AW...
I RESCUED YOU... AT THE LAST SECOND.
YOU WERE TAKEN TO UJIZANE'S SLEEPING QUARTERS.
I REMEMBER I WAS FORCED TO DRINK SAKE...
AWW...
B... BUT...
I'M NOT TIGHTENING.
DON'T TIGHTEN. PLEASE RELAX YOUR MUSCLES.

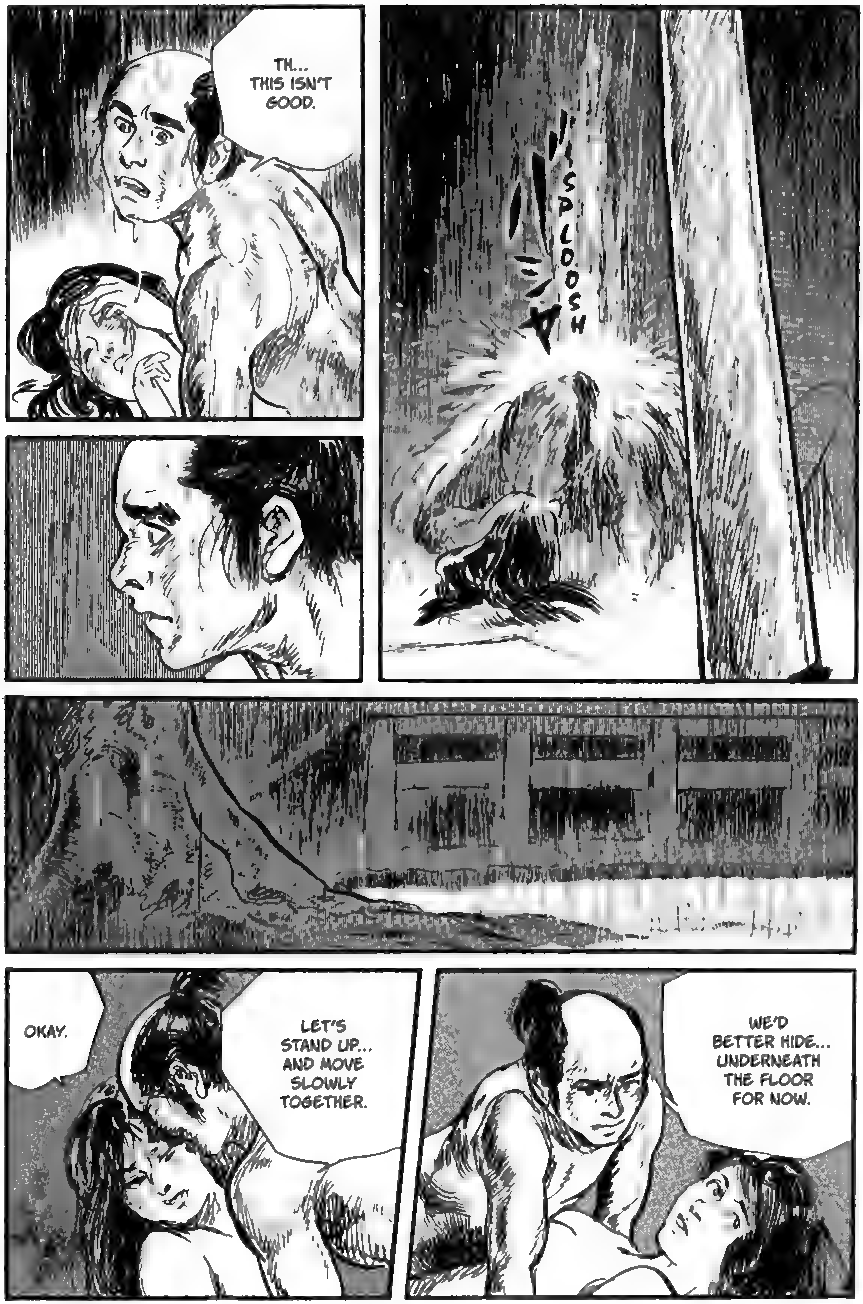
THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO.
IT'S NO TIME TO LAUGH. FOR YOUR SAKE TOO... UKH...
TEE HEE HEE.
IT'S GETTING... TIGHTER... URK... IT'LL TEAR ME.
I... HAVE NOT YET KNOWN A MAN.
URRG...
BESIDES, CAN A WOMAN OPEN OR CLOSE HER VAGINA FOR A MAN?





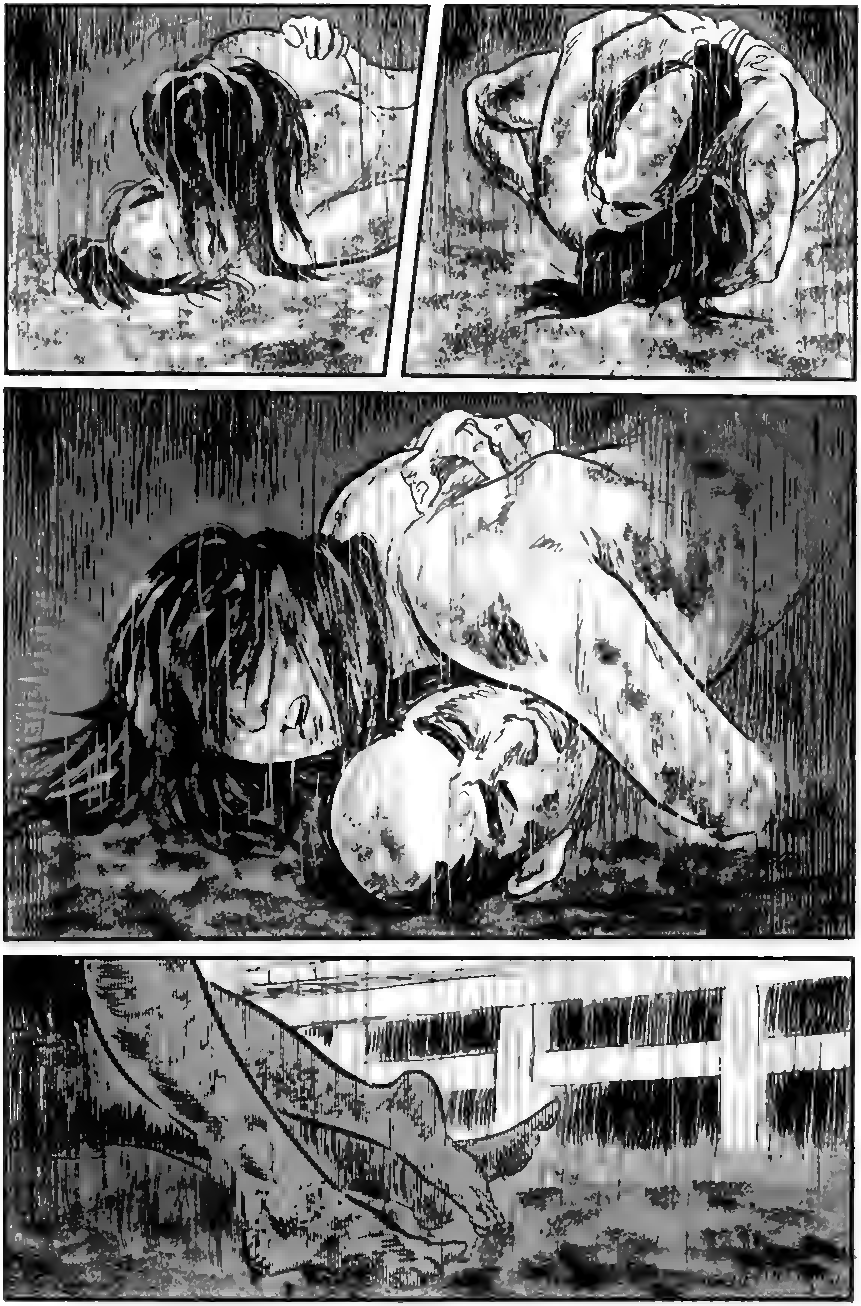
I'M COLD...
YEAH.
YOU ARE COLD.
IT'S... RAINING.

URGH
THE ALCOHOL MUST BE WEARING OFF.
IT'S BEYOND PAIN. I DON'T FEEL ANYTHING NOW.
DOESN'T IT HURT?
IT'S NO GOOD.
BUT IF... I CAN'T GET OFF OF YOU...


TH... THIS ISN'T GOOD.
SPLOOSH
OKAY.
LET'S STAND UP... AND MOVE SLOWLY TOGETHER.
WE'D BETTER HIDE... UNDERNEATH THE FLOOR FOR NOW.

AUK!

AW...
AWW...



UH!
URRG...
MM...
AHH!!
UHHH!!
AKHH!!
AH!

AHHH
AHHH!!
IT...
IT'S
OUT...
AH.
OHH...
IT'S...
COMING...
MM...

NINE, TEN, NINE. TSUKUMO.
YOUR NAME?

YOU ARE TAKEDA'S SUPPA, THEN.
TAKEDA'S MITSUMONO.
FROM WHERE?
TSUKUMO, HUH?
I AM A VASSAL OF MATSUDAIRA MOTOYASU-SAMA.
I AM HATTORI HANZÔ MASANARI.

INDEED SHE WAS THE WOMAN WHO LATER BECAME KNOWN AS HATTORI TSUKUMO, WHOSE DEDICATION TO HANZÔ WAS ADMIRED BY ALL SUPPA
IN TIME PEOPLE WOULD COME TO SAY THAT WHEREVER HANZO MIGHT BE TSUKUMO WAS SURE TO BE THERE AS WELL

LIFT YOUR FACE

HO.
A BIG-EYED WOMAN, ISN'T SHE.
QUITE PRETTY.
MM.
TAKEDA'S *SUPPA* CALLED TSUKUMO, KUH?
...NO MATTER WHAT YOU ASK...
I'M AFRAID, MILORD...
SO WHAT WERE YOU AFTER WHEN YOU ENTERED THE CASTLE OF SUNPU?

IF YOU FORCE HER TO TALK, SHE'LL BITE OFF HER OWN TONGUE.
SHE IS A *SUPPA*.
SHE WON'T ANSWER ME?
BASICALLY, WHAT IT MEANS IS THAT TAKEDA IS ANXIOUS TO KNOW WHAT ACTIONS IMAGAWA WILL TAKE.
MM. CAN'T BE HELPED THEN. AT LEAST NOW WE KNOW SHE'S TAKEDA'S *SUPPA*. YOU'VE DONE WELL.
OYAKATA-*SAMA'S* WIFE IS A SISTER OF TAKEDA HARUNOBU-*DONO*. OYAKATA-*SAMA'S* DAUGHTER IS MARRIED TO HARUNOBU-*DONO'S* SON AND HEIR, YOSHINOBU-*DONO*.
SAD, INDEED.
IT'S SAD.

TAKEDA MUST BE QUITE ANXIOUS TO KNOW WHEN IMAGAWA WILL BRING HIS TROOPS TO THE CAPITAL.
AND YET, THEY SEND *SUPPA* TO PROBE WHAT THE OTHER HAS IN MIND
IN OTHER WORDS, TAKEDA AND IMAGAWA ARE INSEPARABLY INTERTWINED.
BUT WILL THERE BE AN ASSAULT WHILE HE IS AWAY?
BECAUSE OF THE EXISTING ALLIANCES WITH TAKEDA AND HŌJŌ, OYAKATA-*SAMA* WILL WAGE WAR AGAINST THE CAPITAL, THINKING THERE IS NO THREAT DURING HIS ABSENCE.
AND THAT MEANS, TAKEDA, TOO, ASPIRES TO RULE THE COUNTRY.
PAT

IN THAT CASE THERE SHOULD BE NO OTHER ATTACK, I BELIEVE.
IF WE DEFEAT ODA, WHO STANDS IN THE WAY, WE'LL MARCH RIGHT INTO THE CAPITOL.
WHAT DO YOU THINK, HANZŌ?
...TAKEDA WILL STORM SUNPU LIKE A TSUNAMI CRASHING ONTO THE SHORE.
HOWEVER, IF, ONE IN A MILLION CHANCES, ODA WINS AND OYAKATA-SAMA DIES...
MM.
THEY WILL NO DOUBT HELP IMAGAWA AND CLASH WITH TAKEDA.
YES... UJIZANE... SAMA'S WIFE IS... OF HŌJŌ.
THAT MEANS, HŌJŌ'S TURN.

TO ACHIEVE THAT GOAL, HŌJŌ WILL PROBABLY BETRAY UJIZANE.
IF HŌJŌ DEFEATS TAKEDA, THEY'LL SEND UJIZANE TO HIS GRAVE, AND THEY'LL HAVE THE COUNTRY UNDER THEIR THUMB.
THE VICTIMS OF ALL THESE FAMILY INTRIGUES ARE... THE WOMEN.
HOW UNRELIABLE FAMILY CONNECTIONS ARE, IN THE END.
YES.
THAT IS TOO SAD.

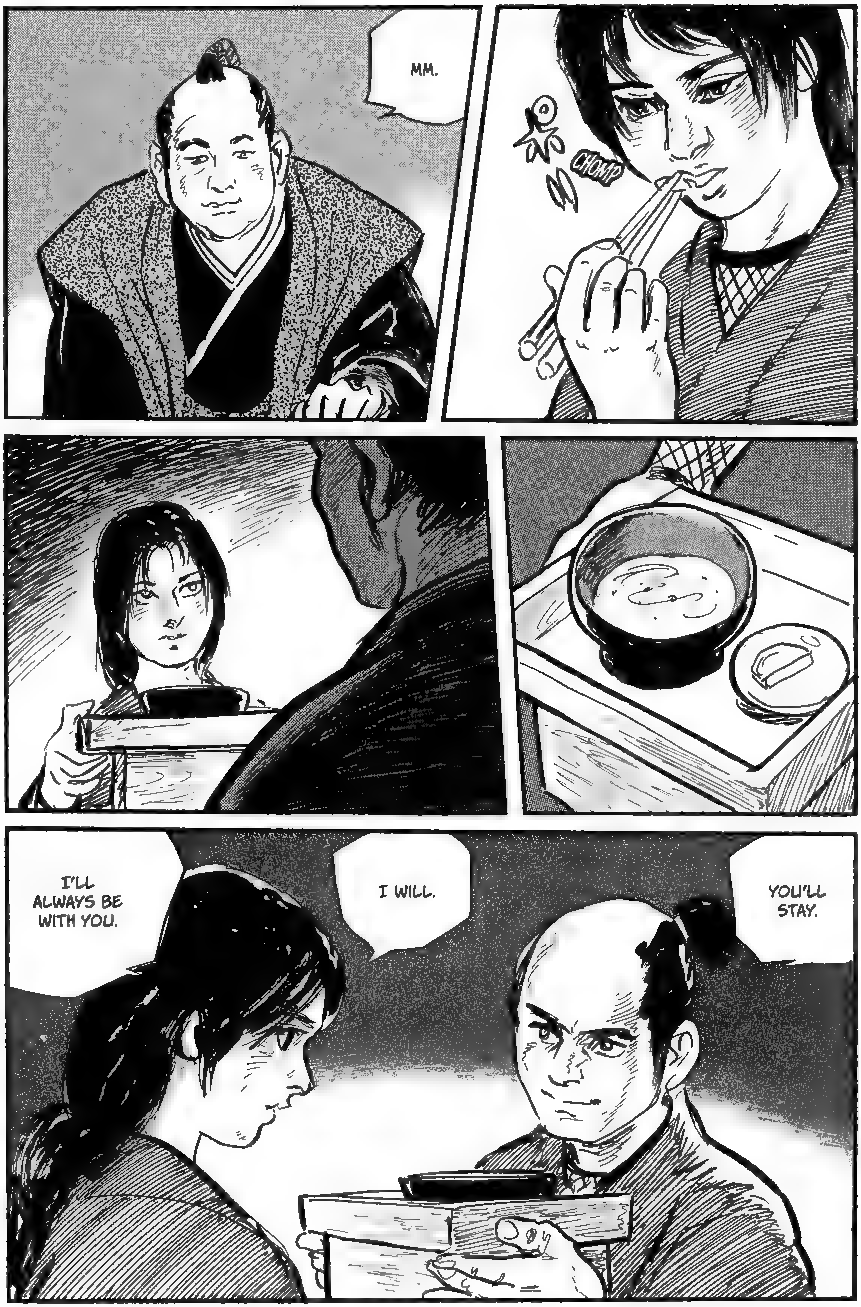
SUPPA WON'T BE PERSUADED BY TEARS.
NO, IT WON'T WORK, MILORD.
...I SUSPECT ODA HAS NO CHANCE OF WINNING.
BUT...
HA HA HA HA HA. OF COURSE.
...OUT OF THIS ONE.
NOT EVEN MY WILDEST IMAGINATION... CAN GET ME...
NO. NOT EVEN ONE IN A MILLION.

YOU MUST BE STARVING, KANZÔ. YOU'VE BEEN AFTER TSUKUMO SINCE DUSK.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
SO I HAD SOME PORRIDGE MADE. YOU SHOULD HAVE SOME.
OF COURSE.
PLEASE ALLOW ME.

EAT
IT'S OKAY IF I GO BACK TO TAKEDA OR I STAY HERE
IT'S OKAY IF YOU EAT OR WANT TO EAT

...EAT.
IF YOU MEAN TO STAY WITH ME...
MUNCH
MUNCH
SLURP


MM.
CHOMP
I'LL ALWAYS BE WITH YOU.
I WILL.
YOU'LL STAY.

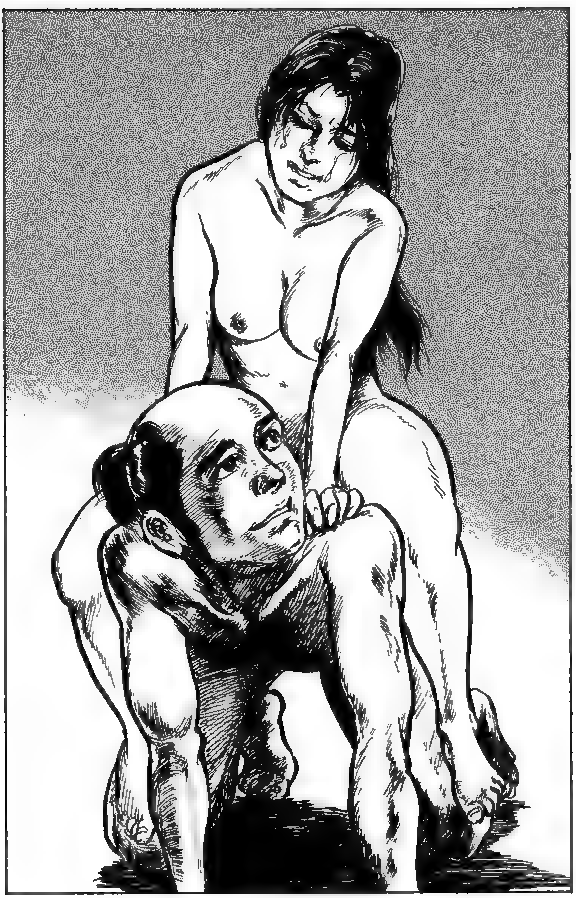
YES, SIR, IT IS.
IS THAT HOW IT IS?
I WAS ORDERED TO SEND A MESSAGE WHEN THE BLUE FLAG BLOSSOMS.
MUNCH
MUNCH
OYAKATA-SAMA DOES?
HE HAS ONE INSIDE HIS ROOM.
THEN YOU DIDN'T NEED TO GO UP ON THE ROOF.

THE TIME IS ALREADY RIPE, BUT IT HASN'T BLOOMED. SO OYAKATA-SAMA...
I GET IT.
TO TAKE A LOOK, I WENT UP ON THE ROOF. INDOOR FLOWERS BLOOM EARLY.
IT SHOULD BE BLOOMING BY NOW.

IT'S BATTLE DRUMS!
IT WAS THE DAWN OF MAY 6TH IN THE THIRD YEAR OF EIROKU
IT WAS AMIDST THE DESTRUCTIVE CLASH OF ARMS AND RAGING WAR WHEN THE BLUE FLAG HAD BLOSSOMED

Chapter On Relinquishing Factions

No. 7: Wife's Horse



TSUKUMO.
CAN YOU SHRINK RICE TO ONE TENTH ITS SIZE?

TAKEDA'S
MITSUMONO
MUST KNOW
HOW.
DON'T YOU
KNOW?

BEFORE EATING, SOAK THE RICE IN COLD WATER, THEN PUT IT IN HOT WATER TO MAKE EDIBLE AGAIN.
DIP SACRED BAMBOO LEAVES IN WATER AND EXTRACT THE SAP. SOAK THE RICE IN THE SAP, THEN STEAM IT. BAKE THE COOKED RICE IN SUNLIGHT. REPEAT THE PROCEDURE UNTIL THE RICE KERNELS ARE AS SMALL AS SESAME SEEDS.
I DON'T WANT TO.
I'M ASKING YOU TO MAKE IT BECAUSE WE'RE GOING TO WAR.

YOU SAID YOU WOULDN'T LEAVE MY SIDE.
YOU SAID YOU'D STAY WITH ME.
UNLESS YOU LET ME BE YOUR WIFE, I WON'T.
SO WHY WON'T YOU DO WHAT I ASK?

...
...
WHAT I SAID WAS I'D BE WITH YOU AS YOUR WIFE.
IF YOU WON'T MARRY ME, I WILL...
...KILL MYSELF.

IF HE SAYS BLOOD IS BLACK, TSUKUMO WILL SAY IT'S BLACK.
IF HANZŌ SAYS CROWS ARE WHITE, TSUKUMO WILL SAY THEY'RE WHITE.
IT'S TOO EARLY. I DON'T KNOW YOU WELL.
HANZŌ, LIFT YOUR FOOT.
IF YOU TELL ME TO KILL, I WILL KILL. IF YOU TELL ME TO DIE, I WILL DIE.

IT ISN'T THE RIGHT TIME.
TSUKUMO WILL DRINK HANZŌ'S URINE AND EAT HIS STOOL.
BUT I CAN'T ASK MY LORD ABOUT THAT NOW...
AFTER THE WAR, IF WE'RE STILL ALIVE, WE'LL MARRY.
NO! MARRY ME NOW!

MY DEAD JIJI-SAMA USED TO DO THAT FOR ME.
WHAT?!
BE A HORSE AND LET ME RIDE ON YOU, THEN.
YOU UNDERSTAND, DON'T YOU, TSUKUMO?
BUT HE ALSO SAID THERE PROBABLY ISN'T ANY MAN WHO'D PLAY AT BEING A HORSE FOR A WOMAN.
AND HE TOLD ME TO BE THE WIFE OF A MAN WHO'D DO THE SAME.

IF THERE WAS A MAN WHO WOULD, THAT MEANT HE LOVED ME FROM HIS HEART WITHOUT RESERVE, JIJISAMA TOLD ME

GET ON, TSUKUMO!
GET ON.
AS LONG AS I LIVE, I'LL HAVE YOU RIDE ON ME.

BUHIH!
HIHIHIH!
HERE COMES MY WIFE.
MY WIFE.

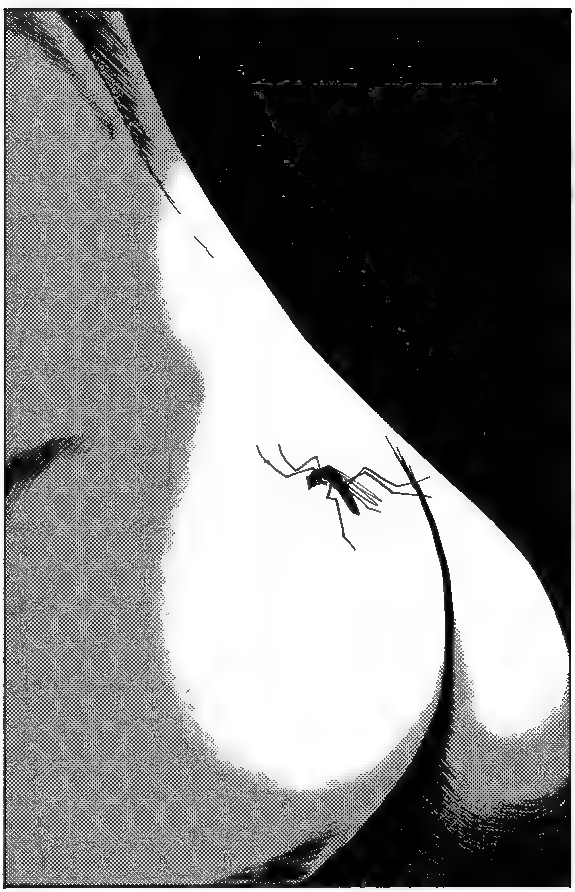
JUST LIKE... JIJI-SAMA.
GHO!
NOT JIJI-SAMA!
A HUSBAND HORSE OF A WIFE.
I'M A HUSBAND HORSE.

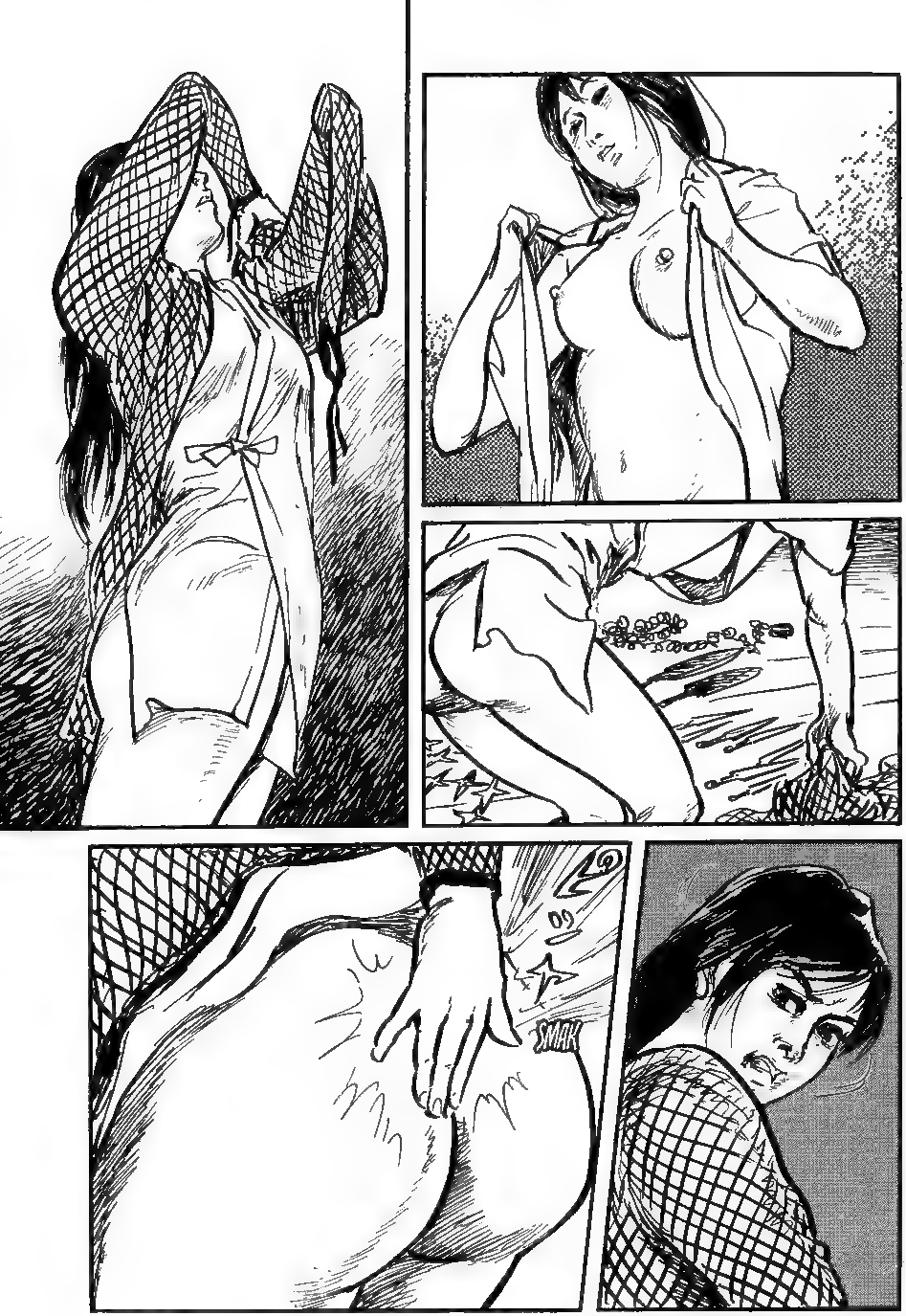
LOOK, THIS WAY, I'M DEFINITELY YOUR HUSBAND HORSE.
WAAHHH
OOL

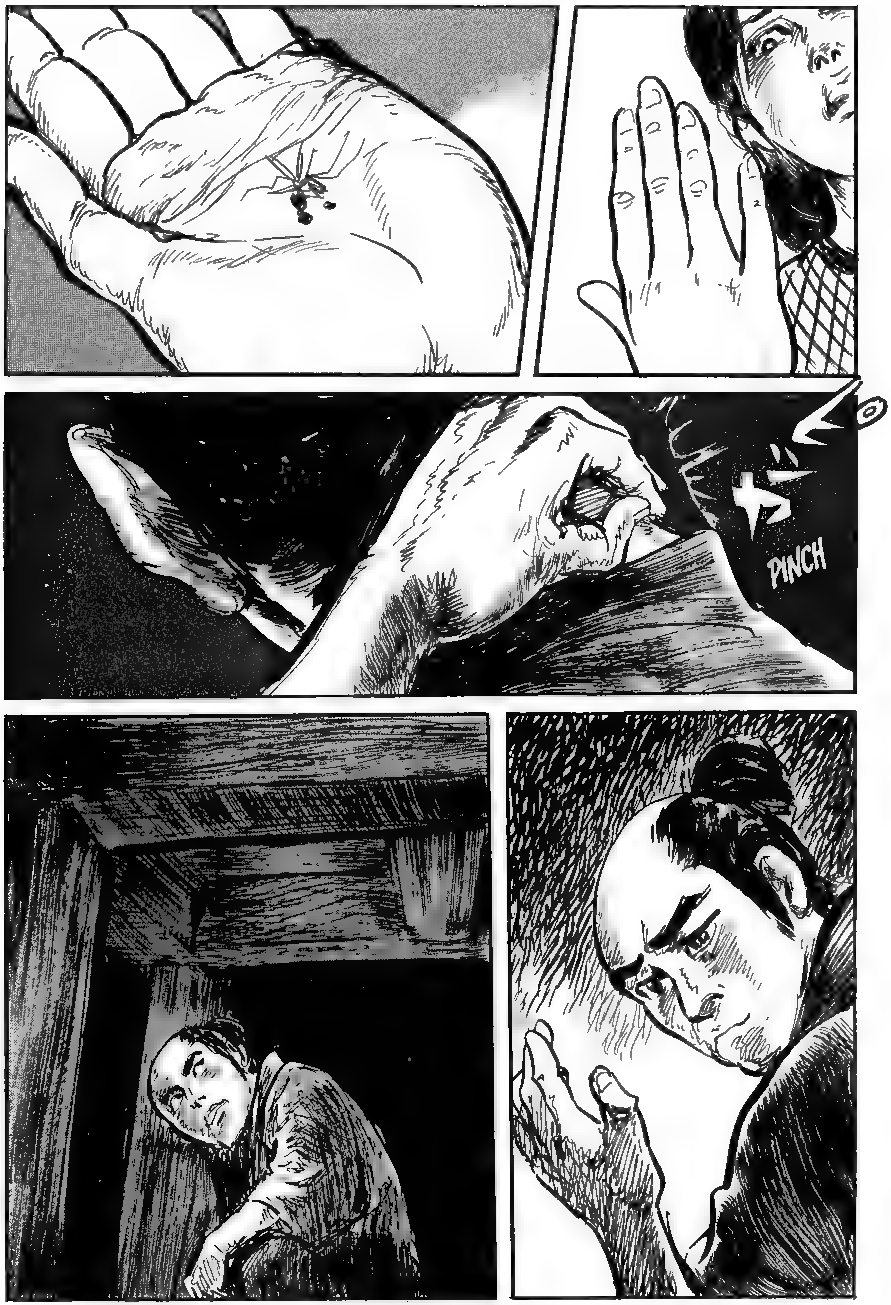
I LOVE YOU!

Chapter On Relinquishing Factions

No. 8: When Bitten by a Mosquito

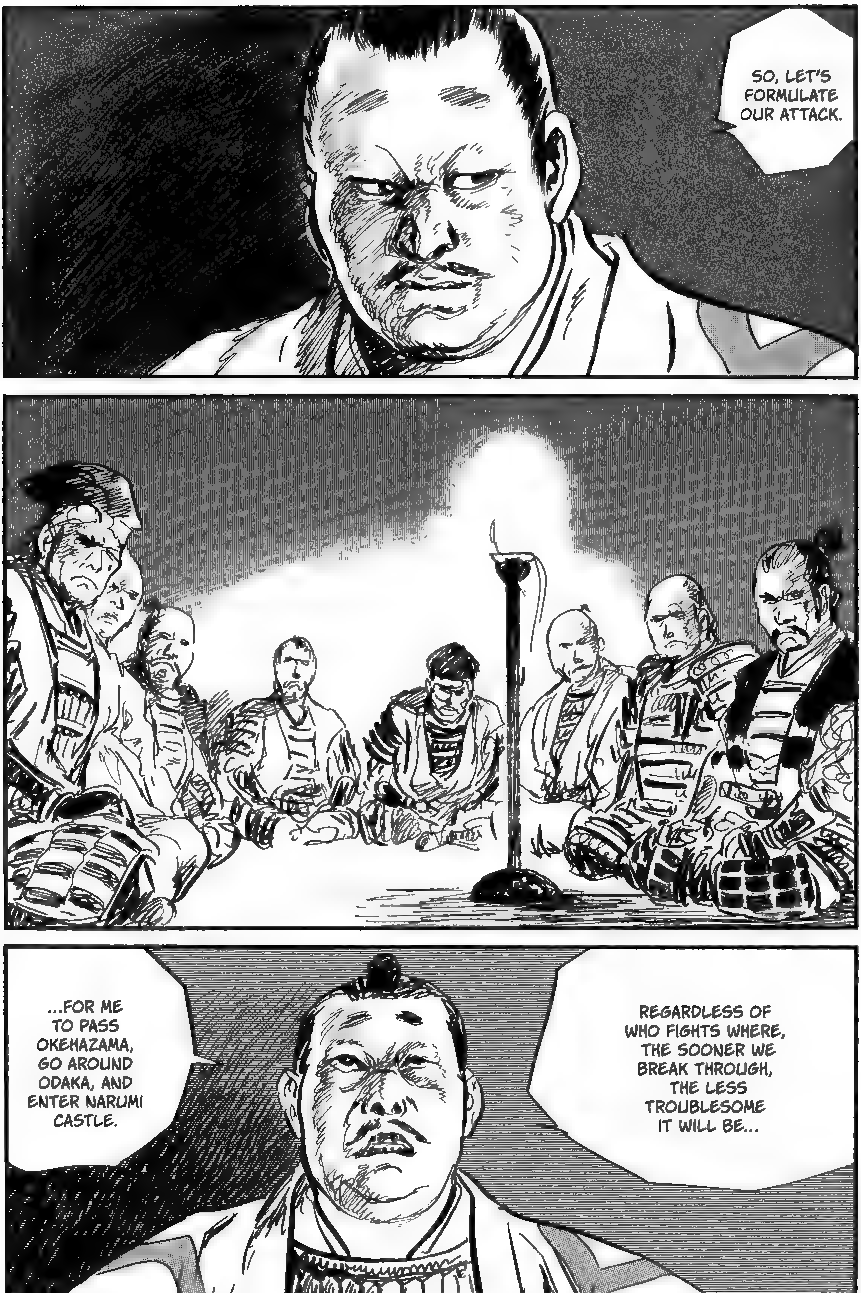



SMACK


PINCH

TO THE NORTH OF NARUMI CASTLE IS MIZUNO TATEWAKI AT THE FORT OF TANGE
TO THE EAST IS SAKUMA NOBUMORI AT THE FORT OF ZENSHOJI TEMPLE
TO THE SOUTH IS KAJIKAWA HEIZAEMON AT THE FORT OF NAKAJIMA

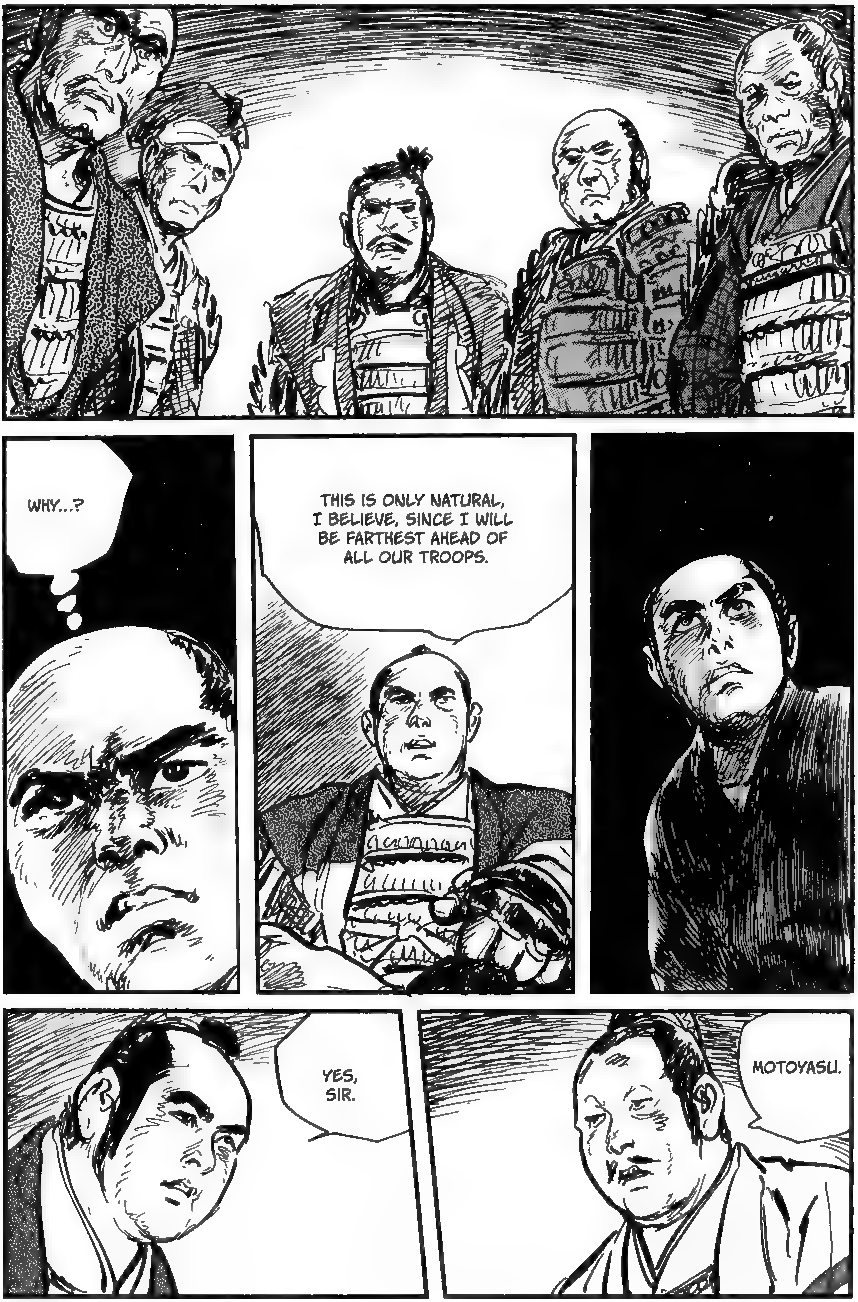
ACROSS FROM ODAKA CASTLE IS SAKUMA MORISHIGE AT THE MARUNE FORT.
ODA NOBUSHIGE IS AT THE WASHIZU FORT. THAT'S THE LINEUP OF ODA.
THE PLAN IS TO ENTER OWARI BY THE EIGHTEENTH, AT THE LATEST, AND SET UP OUR HEADQUARTERS IN KUTSUKAKE.
IT WON'T TAKE A DAY TO BREAK THROUGH.

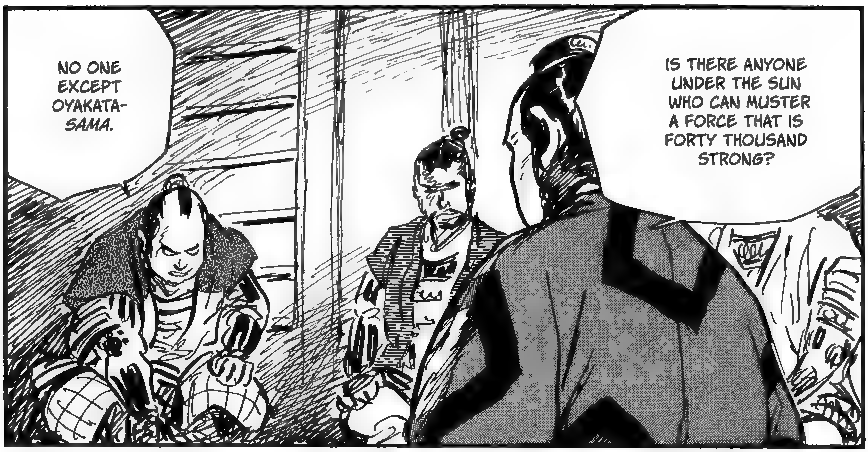

SO, LET'S FORMULATE OUR ATTACK.
...FOR ME TO PASS OKEHAZAMA, GO AROUND ODAKA, AND ENTER NARUMI CASTLE.
REGARDLESS OF WHO FIGHTS WHERE, THE SOONER WE BREAK THROUGH, THE LESS TROUBLESOME IT WILL BE...

SMACK
I BELIEVE WE'LL NEED TO DELIVER PROVISIONS TO ODAKA CASTLE FIRST.

PLEASE LET ME.
THAT'S RIGHT.
THP
EXCELLENT, MOTOYASU.
PLEASE LEAVE THE MATTER TO ME.
PROVISIONS AT ODAKA ARE RUNNING OUT, AND WE CAN'T RISK LOSING THE CASTLE BEFORE WE ARRIVE.

YES.
IT IS NOT AN EASY TASK, MOTOYASU. DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE A STRONG CHANCE AT SUCCESS?
THIS WAY, AS ODA PROMISED, THE MATSUDAIRA FORCE WILL BE ABLE TO ENTER ODAKA CASTLE WITHOUT BEING ATTACKED, AND FROM THERE, SIMPLY WATCH THE BATTLE UNFOLD BELOW.
THAT WAS A PERFECT EXCUSE, MILORD.
...AND LEAD THE ADVANCE FORCE IN THE ATTACK AT MARUNE FORT.
ONCE THE PROVISIONS ARE DELIVERED, I'D LIKE TO IMMEDIATELY TURN AROUND...


WHY...?
THIS IS ONLY NATURAL, I BELIEVE, SINCE I WILL BE FARTHEST AHEAD OF ALL OUR TROOPS.
YES, SIR.
MOTOYASU.


NO ONE EXCEPT OYAKATA-SAMA.
IS THERE ANYONE UNDER THE SUN WHO CAN MUSTER A FORCE THAT IS FORTY THOUSAND STRONG?

MM.
EVEN THOUGH YOU ARE A PART OF THAT FORCE OF FORTY THOUSAND, WHAT YOU SAID IS VALIANT AND WILL INSPIRE MORALE.

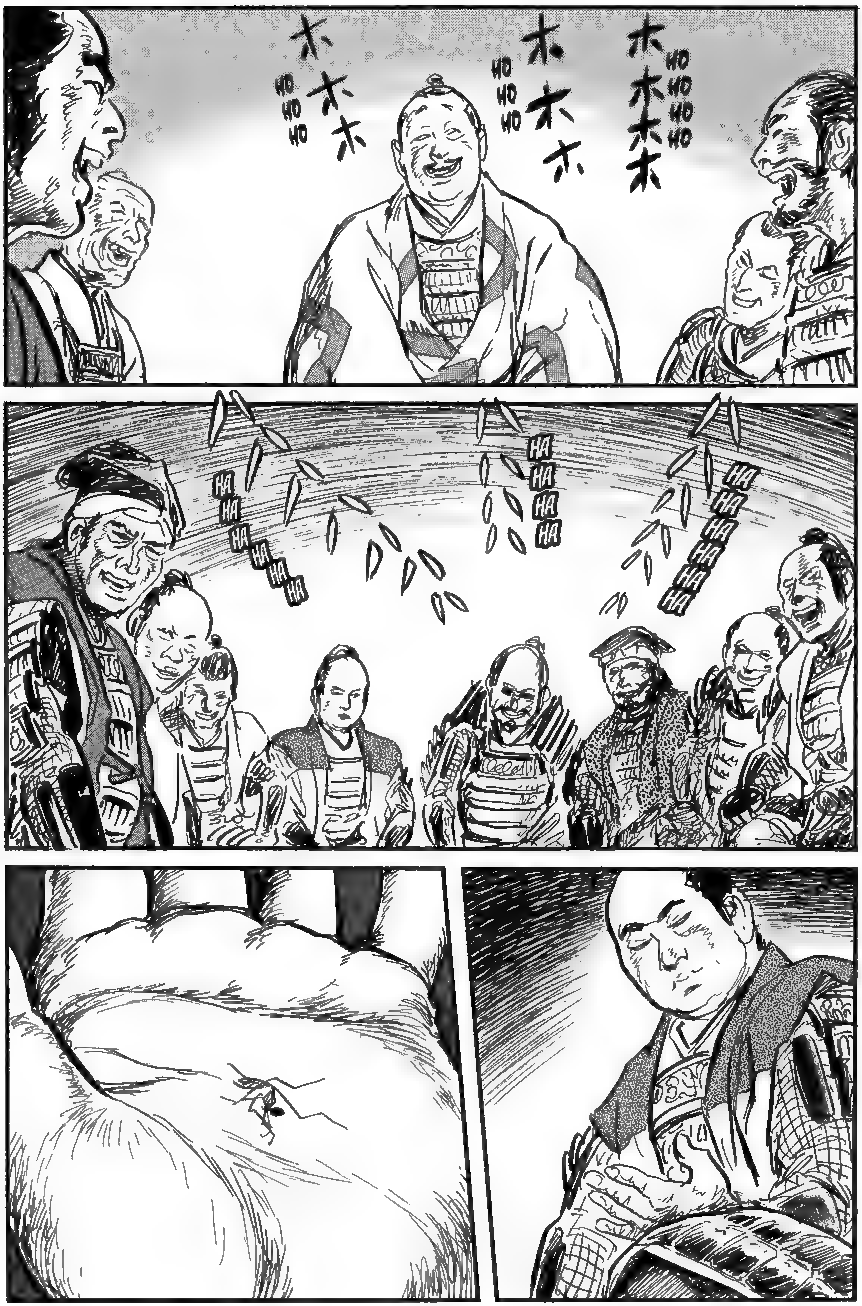
HŌJŌ MAY BARELY PUT TOGETHER TEN THOUSAND.
NO MORE THAN FIVE THOUSAND BY ODA. SEVEN THOUSAND FROM ECHIGO. FIFTEEN THOUSAND FROM TAKEDA.

YES, SIR.
PERMISSION GRANTED! TAKE CHARGE AS THE FORWARD GROUP, AND STRIKE THE FORT OF MARUNE.

NOW THAT I'VE POSTED MOTOYASU TO THE ADVANCE FORCE AND WILL HAVE HIM ATTACK MARUNE, I MUST DECIDE THE POSITIONS OF ALL THE REST OF OUR TROOPS.
TONK
...VOLUNTEER FOR THAT? IT'S LIKE THROWING CHESTNUTS INTO THE FIRE AND AGREEING TO PICK THEM UP.
WHY... DID MY LORD...

UPON THE FALL OF THESE FORTS ALONG THE BORDER, WE WILL ALL STORM KIYOSU IN A SINGLE MOVEMENT.
AND KATSURAYAMA NOBUSADA, YOU TAKE TEN THOUSAND MEN TO KIYOSU.
MIURA BINGO, YOU BRING UP THE REAR FOR ASAHINA.
ASAHINA YASUYOSHI, YOU ATTACK WASHIZU FORT.
YES, MILORD.
YES, SIR
YES, SIR
YES, SIR.

THE MOSQUITO IS JUST ABOUT THE ONLY THING THAT CAN BEAT ME.
HOW ITCHY.
SLAP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HO HO HO
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HO HO HO
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HO HO HO HO
HA HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA

I MAY SURVIVE TEMPORARILY IF I REMAIN INSIDE ODAWA CASTLE AS A SPECTATOR SAFE ABOVE IT ALL
THAT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN I MUST CLING DESPERATELY CLOSE AND SUCK FOR BLOOD
WHEN THE MOSQUITO BIT ME I REALIZED THAT I CAN'T SURVIVE BY RUNNING AWAY

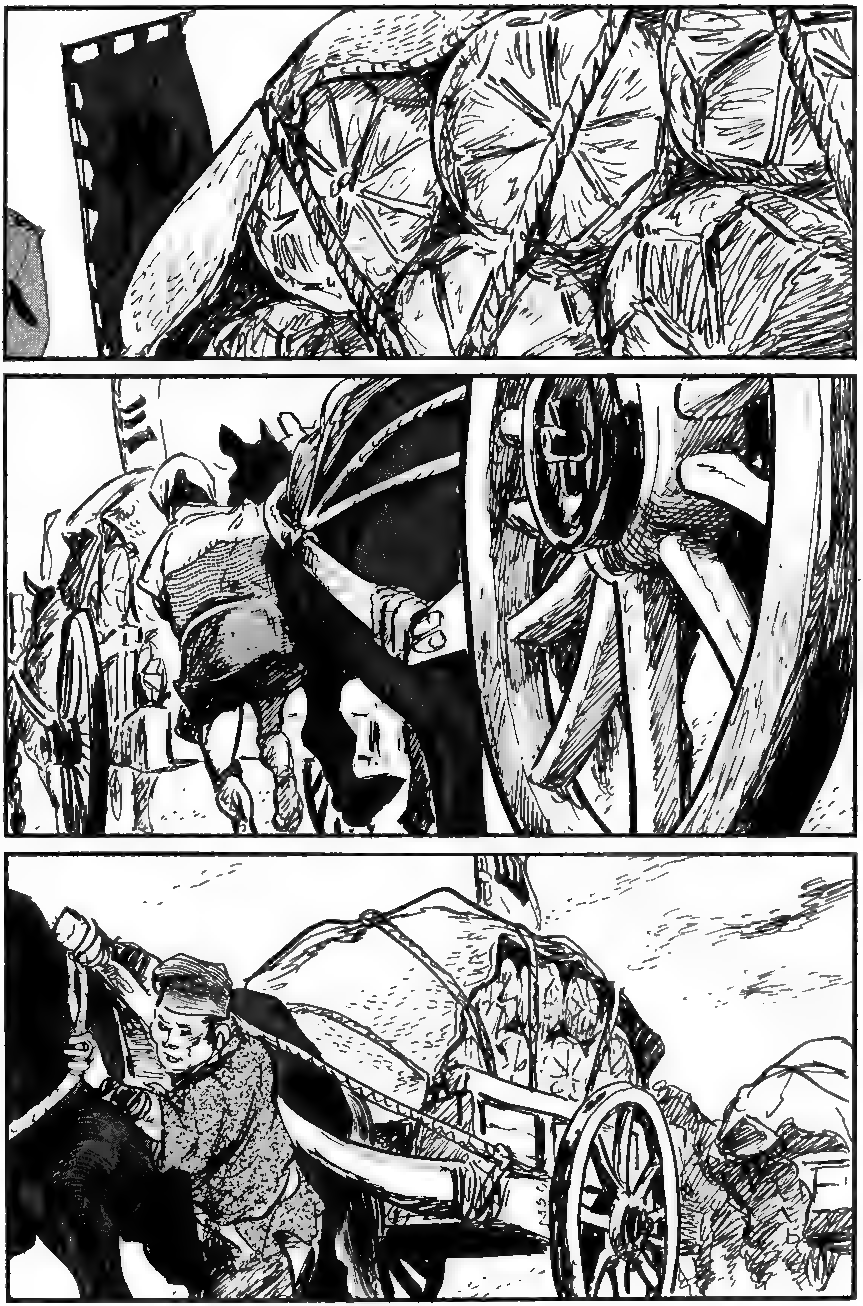
BUT WHAT IF NOBUNAGA WINS? WHAT WOULD THAT MEAN TO ME?
I'D NEVER BE ABLE TO DEFY HIM, AND I WOULD HAVE TO LIVE FOREVER AS A LACKEY OF ODA. SO I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE TIME TO BECOME A MOSQUITO AND PRICK A BIT OF NOBUNAGA-*DONO'S* BLOOD.
BESIDES, I CAN'T LET ANY STRANGE RUMORS COME UP AFTER IMAGAWA'S VICTORY.
IT'S JUST A LITTLE PRICK...

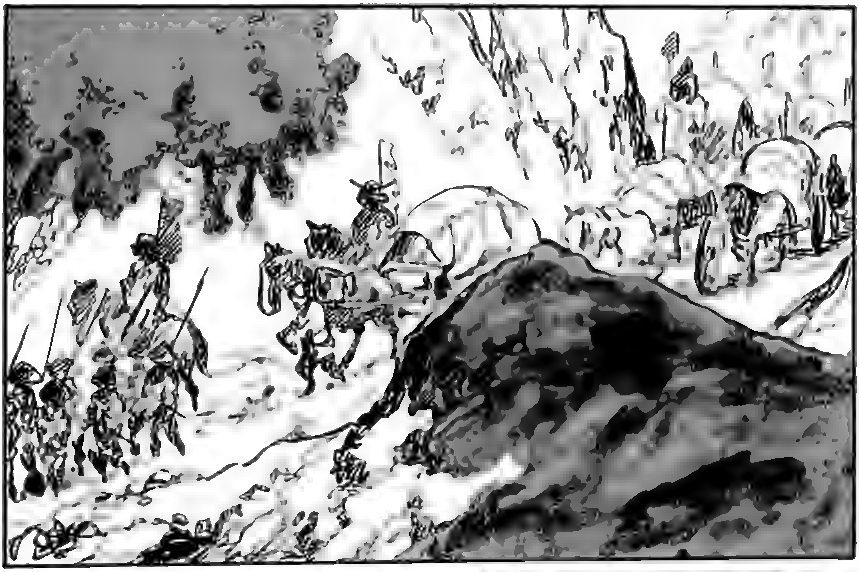
Chapter On Relinquishing Factions

No. 9: Comparison of a Man

YES.
UJIZANE.
...
...
IF YOU WERE GIVEN THE TASK, HOW WOULD YOU DELIVER PROVISIONS TO ODAKA CASTLE?

THERE'S NO DOUBT THAT THE ODA FORCES FROM MARUNE AND WASHIZU WILL BE DESPERATE TO BLOCK, KILL MOTOYASU, AND TAKE OUR SUPPLIES.
HE MAY LIVE, ONE OUT OF TEN CHANCES. IT'S NOTHING BUT A DEATH ROAD. IT'S SEVERAL HUNDRED TIMES MORE DIFFICULT THAN LEADING A MERE ADVANCE UNIT.
THIS IS GOING TO BE A HARSH BATTLE FOR MOTOYASU. HE'LL HAVE TO FIGHT AS HE PROTECTS THE FOOD. HE CANNOT ATTACK, NOR CAN HE RETREAT.
HE MUST INTEND TO DIE.
HE MAY THINK HE HAS SOME CHANCE OF SURVIVING... BUT ON TOP OF THAT, HE SAYS HE'LL ATTACK MARUNE IMMEDIATELY AFTERWARD.
TO VOLUNTEER FOR SUCH A BIG JOB...





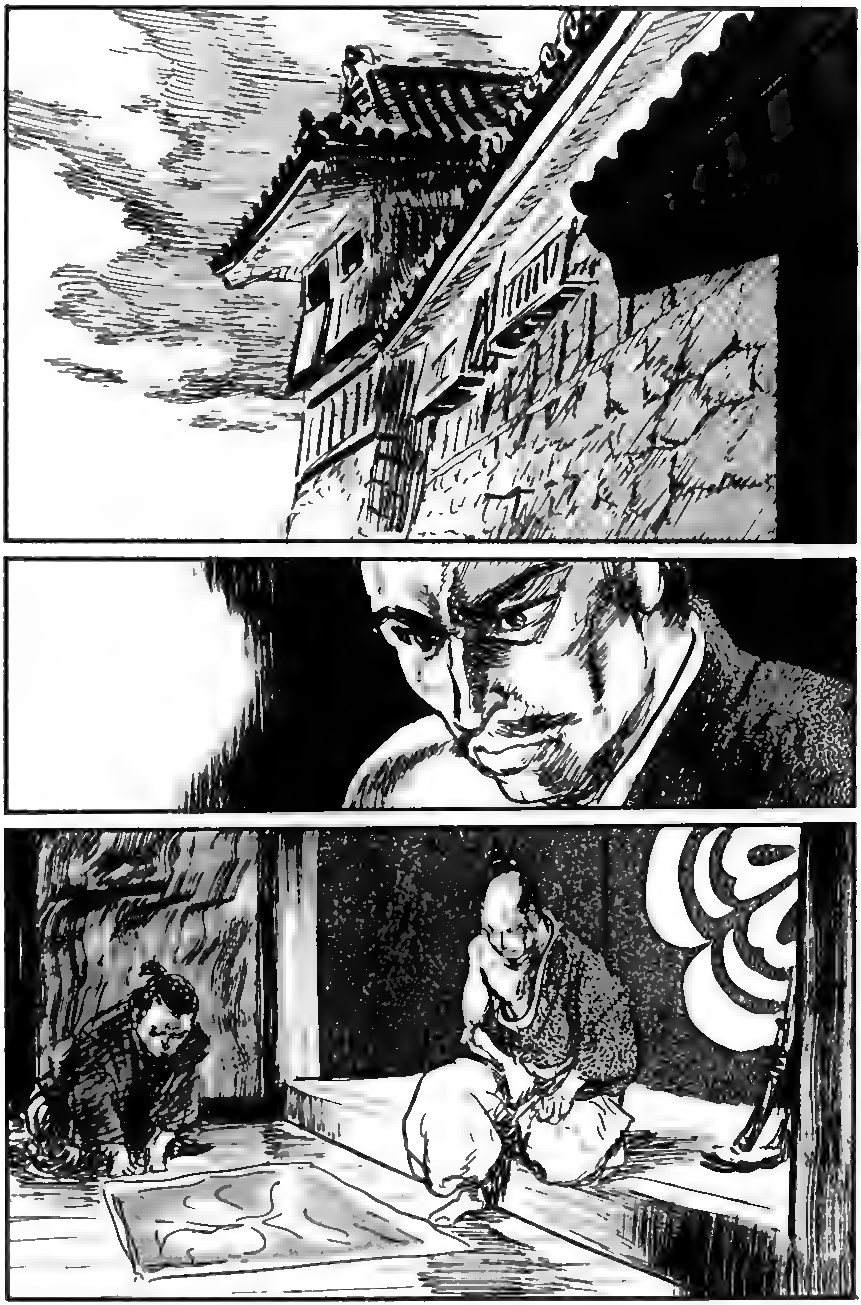
I'D SEND MY SHOCK TROOPS TO WASHIZU.
HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT IT?
ODA FORCES AREN'T THAT EASY TO BEAT.
AND WITH THEM GONE, I'D SEND MY WAGONS TO ODAKA.
THAT WOULD MAKE ODA'S TROOPS IN MARUNE RUSH OVER THERE.
AND YOU MUST NOT MAKE LIGHT OF ODA'S SUPPA. WE'D BETTER TAKE IT FOR GRANTED THAT A GREAT NUMBER OF THEIR SCOUTS WERE SENT TO THE BORDER.
THEY'LL KNOW. EVEN IF WE ATTACK TERABE IN AN ATTEMPT TO DRAW THEIR TROOPS FROM BOTH MARUNE AND WASHIZU, THEY'LL KNOW WE MEAN TO MAKE THE DELIVERY TO ODAKA WHILE THEY'RE PREOCCUPIED.

MAKE A SAVAGE ATTEMPT TO BREAK THROUGH THE ENEMY. THAT'S ALL.
THEN HOW?!
THE FAMOUS, FIERCE SAMURAI OF MIKAWA MAY DIE OFF AFTER THIS BATTLE-- SINCE MOTOYASU SAYS HE'LL ATTACK MARUNE WITH HIS SURVIVING TROOPS ON TOP OF IT.
MOTOYASU WILL LOSE MOST OF HIS MEN.
THAT'S WHY I BELIEVE HE IS PREPARED TO DIE.

WHY IS THAT?
AND YET, HE VOLUNTEERS TO DIE FOR IMAGAWA...
UH-HUH
I THOUGHT MOTOYASU'S ULTIMATE DESIRE WAS TO RETURN TO MIKAWA AS A FEUDAL LORD OF OKAZAKI HAVEN'T THE SAMURAI OF MIKAWA ENDURED UNTIL NOW, JUST SO THAT THE DAY WOULD COME?
BUT HE CANNOT TELL ME SO IN WORDS THAT MUST BE WHY HE TRIES TO SHOW IT THROUGH HIS ACTIONS INSTEAD

YOSHIMOTO COULD NOT SEE IT ANY OTHER WAY AND HE FELT A PANG IN HIS HEART
I COULD REMOVE UJIZANE AND HAVE MOTOYASU AS MY SUCCESSOR. HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO BUILD A FOUNDATION THAT WOULD SECURE IMAGAWA DESIGN FOR GENERATIONS
O THAT

YES...
LIJIZANE MIGHT BE ABLE TO LEAD A HAPPIER LIFE THAT WAY...
...DO THAT.
I WILL...



BRING MY ORDERS TO MARUNE AND WASHIZU NOW.
ATTACK MOTOYASU AND TAKE THEIR SUPPLIES.
YES, SIR.
BALDY RAT.
I PROMISED NOT TO TAKE HIS LIFE, BUT I DON'T REMEMBER AGREEING NOT TO TAKE THEIR SUPPLIES.
B... BUT THE PROMISE...
THAT MEANS, YOU'LL HAVE TO BREAK YOUR PROMISE ABOUT LETTING HIM OFF THE HOOK WITH JUST A FEIGNED ATTACK.
THE *SAMURAI* OF MIKAWA CARE ABOUT THEIR NAME. THEY'LL DEFINITELY TRY WITH ALL THEIR MIGHT TO PROTECT THEIR PROVISIONS.
ER... YES... BUT...

IF MOTOYASU-SAMA LOSES HIS MEN, HE WILL ALSO..
I AGREED TO LET MOTOYASU OFF THE HOOK, BUT NOT HIS MEN.
..AND GAVE HIM THE WISDOM HE NEEDS FOR HIS SURVIVAL, I CAN'T HELP HIM.
IF HE WISHES TO KILL HIMSELF, AFTER I TOOK THE TROUBLE...
IT SHOULD BE EASY TO TAKE THEIR PROVISIONS.
HE MUST NOT BE PREPARED FOR AN ATTACK AT ALL.

BESIDES, THE FEARLESSNESS OF THE MIKAWA SAMURAI IS FAMOUS
IT WOULD BE A BIG PROBLEM IF THOSE PROVISIONS MADE IT INTO ODAKA
IT'S BEST TO DECEIVE HEH HEH HEH HEH
THERE'S NO POINT IN FIGHTING THE WRONG WAY AND SUFFERING HEAVY LOSSES
HE NEVER CARED WHAT HAPPENED TO EYASU ALL THAT TALK WAS NOTHING BUT A PLOT TO TAKE EYASU BY SURPRISE AND GRAB THEIR SUPPLIES
EVEN THOUGH HE IS MY MASTER HIS CHARACTER

OTHERWISE, HE'D HAVE TO USE HIS MASTER TO MAKE HIMSELF POWERFUL. EITHER WAY, IN HIS CALM, PENETRATING MIND, HE RESOLVED NOT TO SERVE NOBUNAGA TRULY BUT TO ONLY HUMOR HIM.
IN THAT MOMENT, HIDEYOSHI TOLD HIMSELF THAT, SOMEDAY, HE'D HAVE TO LEAVE HIS MASTER
I IMAGINE KIPPÔSHI-DONO WILL ATTACK US DESPITE HIS PROMISE.

HE IS THAT SORT OF MAN.
WITH FULL FORCE, NOT A FAKE ATTACK...
A TIGER OF A FATHER AND A WOLF OF A BROTHER... HOW DIFFICULT
BUT... IF HE DOESN'T, I'D FIND SOMETHING BROTHERLY IN HIM.
IT'S ABOUT TIME. TELL EVERYONE TO BE PREPARED TO RUN LIKE MAD.

WILL THE ODA FORCES STRIKE US... FOR REAL?

WHAT ARE HIS WORDS MEANT FOR?!
IF THEY DO, WHY DID NOBUNAGA HAVE HIYOSHI, THE BALDY RAT, SUMMON ME FOR AN AUDIENCE JUST TO TELL ME HE DIDN'T WANT TO KILL MY LORD...?
KIPPŌSHI-*DONO* SAID HE'D SPARE MY LIFE, BUT HE DIDN'T SAY HE WOULDN'T HARM THE PROVISIONS OR MY TROOPS.
BUT HE SAID HE'D FEIGN THE ATTACK.
NO...

SO LONG AS HE DOESN'T TAKE MY LIFE, IT COULD BE CONSIDERED JUST A FEINT.
DOESN'T THAT MEAN HE WON'T REALLY DO IT?
THERE'S A WORD, KYŌYŪ.
THE LORD OF ODA WOULDN'T USE SUCH SOPHISTRY, WOULD HE...?
THE LATE TAIGEN SŪFU SESSAI, THE MILITARY ADVISOR, ONCE TAUGHT ME...

YES.
TAKECHIYO.
IT MEANS A STRONG BUT CUNNING GENERAL.
WHAT DOES THE WORD KYŌYŪ MEAN?

IF YOU ARE A WARLORD, THERE WILL BE TIMES WHEN YOU ACTUALLY TRUST YOUR ENEMY BUT A KYÔYÛ CAN'T EVEN TRUST HIS OWN MEN
NOT NECESSARILY CUNNING IT'S MORE APPROPRIATE TO DEFINE THE TERM AS A GENERAL WHO DOES NOT TRUST OTHERS
HENCE, A KYÔYÛ IS DESTINED TO FALL BY THE HANDS OF HIS OWN MEN
AND BECAUSE HE CAN'T BE HURTS AND TRAMPLES ON THEIR HEARTS WITHOUT SCRUPLE
YOU MUST BECOME A ROCK STEADY WARLORD LIKE OYAKATA SAMA
TAKECHIYO, YOU MUST NOT BECOME A KYÔYÛ

YES.
I HAVE A FEELING...
... KIPPPŌSHI-DŌNO MAY VERY WELL BE A KYŌYŪ.

HOW CAN HE SAY THAT?
I AM IMAGAWA'S GENERAL, AFTER ALL. HOW IS IT POSSIBLE FOR HIM TO PITY AN ENEMY GENERAL, AND TO SAY THAT HE'D LET ME, HIS ENEMY, ESCAPE SO I CAN SAFELY WATCH THE FIGHT FROM ABOVE?
IF I LISTENED TO KIPPŌSHI-*DONO* AND FOLLOWED HIS ADVICE, WHAT WOULD ANYONE SAY ABOUT ME LATER? I BET I'D HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO BECOME A PRIEST THEN.
EVEN I HAVE A NAME TO PROTECT, AND SHAME TO FEEL.

I'D TELL HIM WE SHOULD FIGHT WITH ALL OUR STRENGTH.
IF I WAS IN KIPPOSHI-DONO'S POSITION... I'D ADVISE HIM TO BE PREPARED WHEN WE MEET ON THE BATTLEFIELD, BECAUSE I WILL FIGHT WITHOUT MERCY.
IT'S BECAUSE HE DOESN'T CARE, NOR DOES HE TRUST ME, THAT HE CAN TELL ME TO SIMPLY BECOME A SPECTATOR.
HOW SAD.
THAT'S WHY HE'LL ATTACK FOR REAL. AFTER LOWERING MY GUARD, HE'LL COME TO ROB US.
AS FAR AS KIPPŌSHI-DONO IS CONCERNED, I'M A MERE PEBBLE.

THE MILITARY ADVISOR, SESSAI, TOLD ME SO...
HE'S SO STRONG, HE WON'T STOP ONCE HE BEGINS HIS CHARGE.
BUT A *KYŌYŪ* IS STRONG.
BUT A GREAT WARLORD FIGHTS TODAY WHILE STILL WEIGHING THE AFTERMATH OF WAR.
A *KYŌYŪ* FOCUSES ON AND BECOMES FRANTIC OVER WHAT'S AT HAND.
KIPPŌSHI-*DONO*, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS ONLY FOCUSED ON THE APPROACHING IMAGAWA...
THE FACT IS, ODA IS NOT ON OYAKATA-*SAMA'S* MIND. OYAKATA-*SAMA* IS PREOCCUPIED WITH THE IDEA OF HOW TO RULE THE COUNTRY ONCE HE TAKES REIGN.

IN THE EVENT THAT ODA WINS, WOULD IT NOT OPEN UP YOUR FUTURE, MILORD?
IT MAKES ME WORRY. WHAT COULD NOT HAPPEN MIGHT HAPPEN...
IF KIPPŌSHI-DONO WINS, I HAVE THE FEELING THAT MY FATE WILL BE TO CARRY THE HEAVIEST LOAD, FOREVER STRUGGLING AND TRUDGING ON A LONG PATH.
NO, IT'S THE OPPOSITE.
YOU COULD RETURN TO OKAZAKI, AND YOU COULD MAKE PEACE WITH NOBUNAGA-SAMA.
BUT...

IEYASU THOUGHT. SO INDEED, THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME HE TRULY FELT CLOSE TO YOSHIMOTO, AS IF HE WERE HIS FATHER
...IF YOSHIMOTO WINS AND THEN TAKES CONTROL OF THE COUNTRY, HE MIGHT LET ME RULE THE NATION. HOW EASY AND SHORT SUCH A PATH MIGHT BE
DO TRUM
DO TRUM
DO TRUM
DO TRUM

BE PREPARED!!
ODA IS COMING!!
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM

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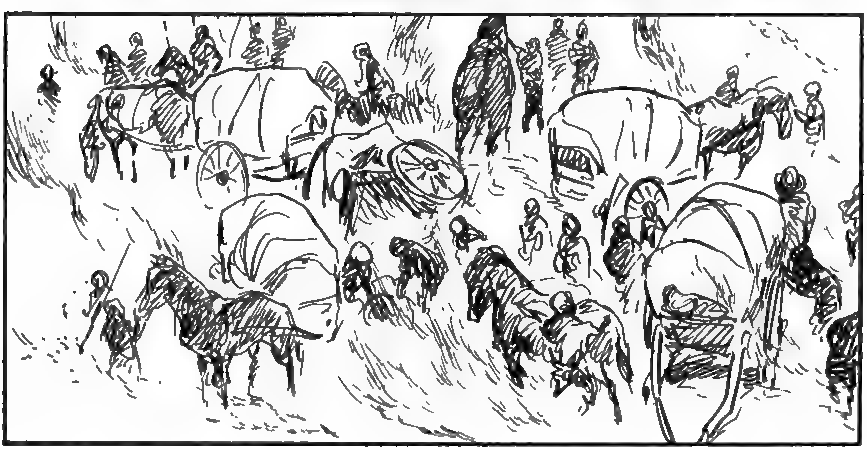
TRUM

MILORD! WE ARE ATTACKED FROM BOTH SIDES.

WHEN THEY ARE ABOUT TO CATCH UP, THROW OFF YOUR LOADS!
RUN! KEEP YOUR EYES GLUED TO ODAKA CASTLE AND RUN!
RUUUUN!!

GARA
GARA
GAAA
TRATTA
THROW THE LOADS!

DON'T FOLLOW! TAKE THE SUPPLIES.



I DON'T GET IT...
わっ!
ウッ!
HMM!

HMPH!
THEY DROPPED THESE.
MY GOD. THEY HAVE MORE THAN ENOUGH. THE LEADERSHIP OF MOTOYASU-*DONO* AND THE WISDOM OF HANZO HAVE DONE IT.
THEY TURNED RICE INTO SESAME SEEDS. A MAN CAN EASILY CARRY *ITTO*. IF SEVEN HUNDRED MEN CARRY THAT MUCH APIECE, IT'S...
MUNCH MUNCH
THEY'VE SEEN THROUGH MY MASTER'S CHARACTER.

GASHI
I DO NOT REMEMBER ORDERING YOU TO SEIZE DIRT!!
BALDY RAT!!
GASHI

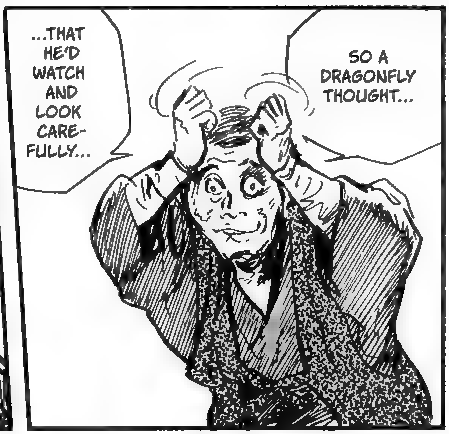
IF THERE IS AN ART TO SHRINK RICE DOWN TO THE SIZE OF SESAME SEEDS, YOU SHOULD'VE THOUGHT OF THAT!
YOU ARE A SUPPA, AND YET YOU DID NOT SEE IT COMING!!
AREN'T YOU ALSO A SUPPA YOURSELF?!
HOW DARE YOU SHOW YOUR FACE AFTER BEING OUTWITTED BY SOMEONE LIKE MOTOYASU!!
KRAK
KRAK

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR BIG MOUTH?
SAY SOMETHING, BALDY RAT!!
FLEA'S PRICK, MOSQUITO'S EYES, AND A DRAGONFLY'S BANDANA. HOW PATHETIC THEY ARE.
BZZZ
?!

IMPOSSIBLE TO SEE NO MATTER HOW.

FLEA'S PRICK AND MOSQUITO'S EYES.

BUT A DRAGONFLY'S HEAD IS HIS EYES.
...AS HE TIED ON A *HACHIMAKI* HEADBAND AND TRIED HIS HARDEST.


...THAT HE'D WATCH AND LOOK CARE-FULLY...
SO A DRAGONFLY THOUGHT...

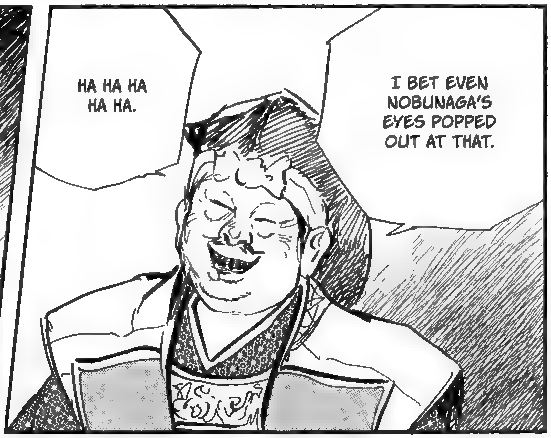
BAM

THE *HACHIMAKI* HEADBAND MAKES IT EVEN HARDER TO SEE!!
BAM

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
UWA HA HA.
THE DRAGONFLY SHEDS TEARS BECAUSE HE CANNOT SEE.

JUST LIKE THE DRAGONFLY, A *SUPPA* CANNOT SEE SMALL THINGS.
I GET IT.
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
COMPARED TO THE PROVISIONS NEEDED TO RULE THE COUNTRY, THE SUPPLIES FOR ODAKA CASTLE ARE NOTHING BUT A FLEA'S PRICK AND MOSQUITO'S EYES.
YES, SIR.
COMPARED TO THE PROVISIONS NEEDED TO RULE THE COUNTRY, HUH? HA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA.

OH, GREAT. MOTOYASU KNEW THE WAY TO MAKE RICE AS SMALL AS SESAME SEEDS, THEN. HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA.


HA HA HA HA HA.
I BET EVEN NOBUNAGA'S EYES POPPED OUT AT THAT.

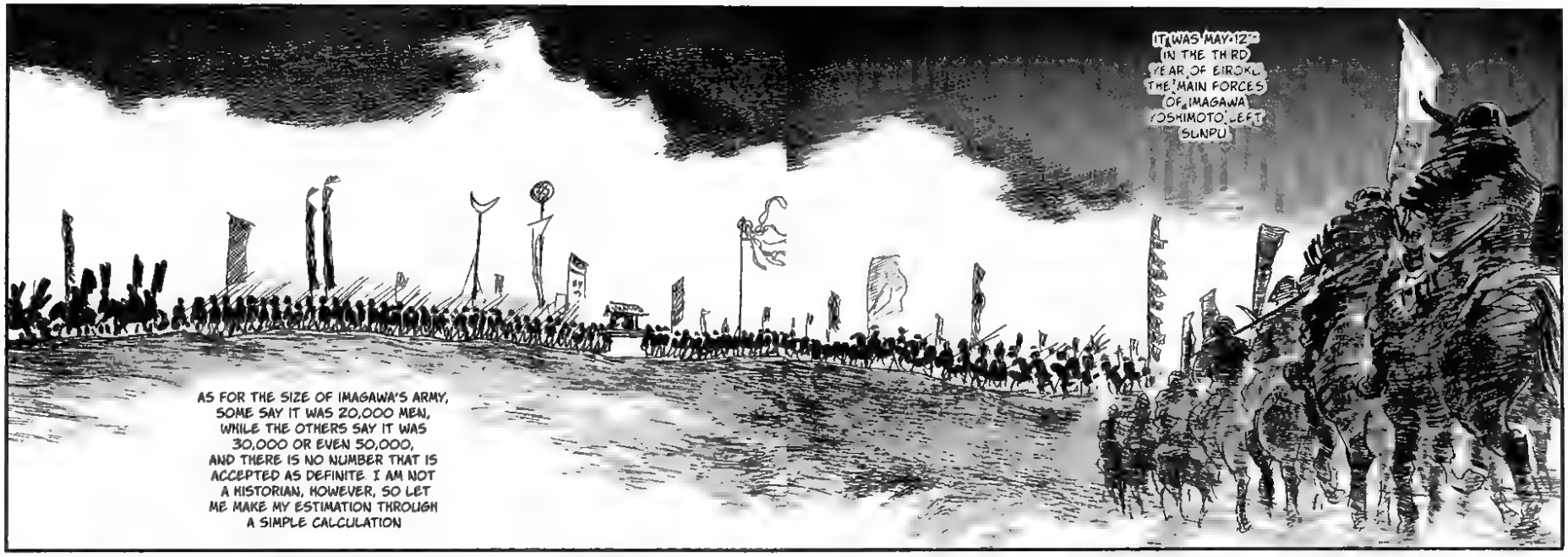
IF ANYONE BLOCKS MY WAY, MAKE A MOUNTAIN OF THEIR BODIES.
ALL FORCES, MOVE OUT!!

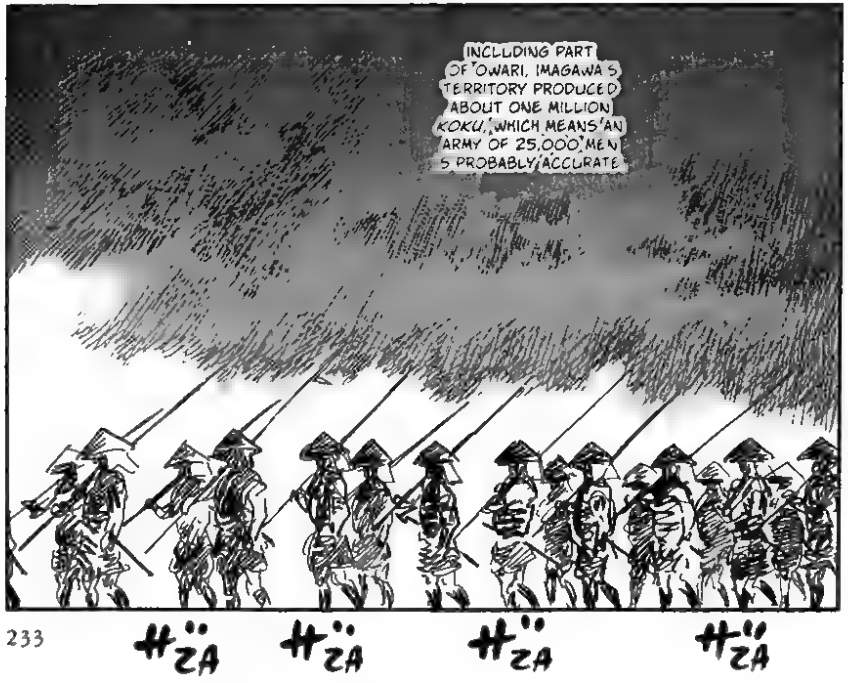
UJIZANE, TAKE CHARGE IN MY ABSENCE.
YES, SIR.

WHICH MAN'S BOWL WILL BE FILLED WITH THE CONQUEROR'S DRINK, I WONDER MY MASTER'S, OR YOSHIMOTO'S?
WILL I EVER GET A TURN MYSELF..?
BUT MOTOYASU-DONO MAY
NOT A CHANCE.
AH HA HA HA HA HA HA.

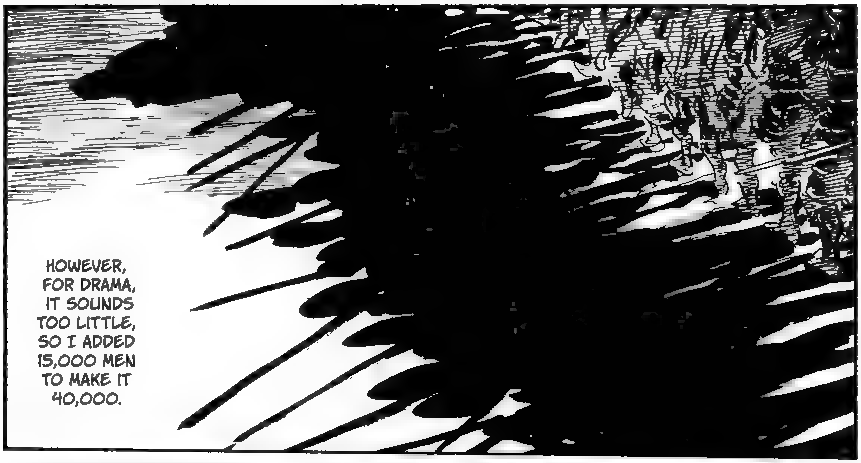
Chapter On Relinquishing Death

No. 1: Straw Sandals for Conqueror's Horses

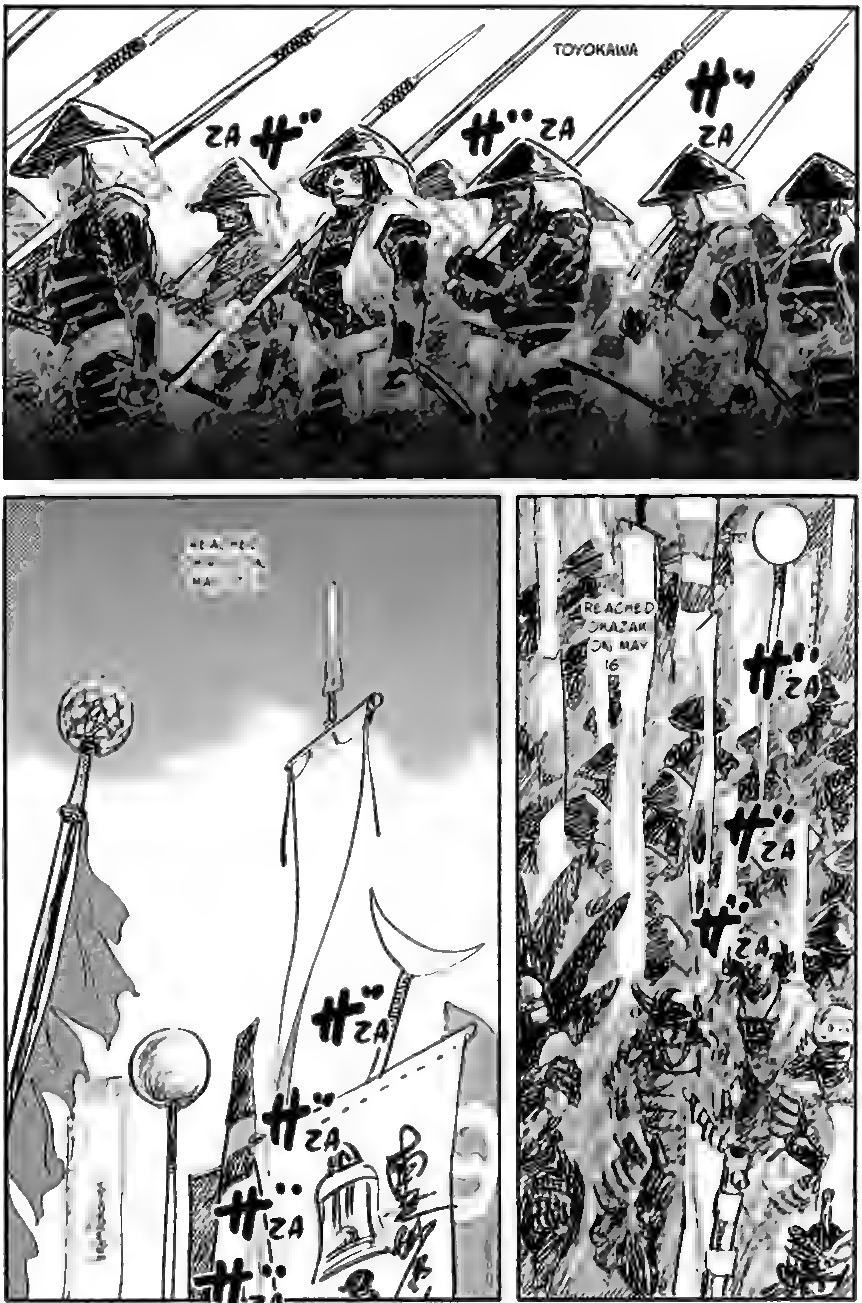

IT WAS MAY 12TH IN THE THIRD YEAR OF EIROKU. THE MAIN FORCES OF IMAGAWA YOSHIMOTO LEFT SUNPU
AS FOR THE SIZE OF IMAGAWA'S ARMY, SOME SAY IT WAS 20,000 MEN, WHILE THE OTHERS SAY IT WAS 30,000 OR EVEN 50,000, AND THERE IS NO NUMBER THAT IS ACCEPTED AS DEFINITE. I AM NOT A HISTORIAN, HOWEVER, SO LET ME MAKE MY ESTIMATION THROUGH A SIMPLE CALCULATION


INCLUDING PART OF OWARI, IMAGAWA'S TERRITORY PRODUCED ABOUT ONE MILLION KOKU, WHICH MEANS AN ARMY OF 25,000 MEN IS PROBABLY ACCURATE

THEY SAY TEN THOUSAND KOKU OF RICE CAN FEED AN ARMY OF 250 MEN. AFTER CALCULATING IT IN DETAIL MYSELF I HAVE COME TO AGREE WITH THAT ESTIMATION. THAT MEANS A HUNDRED THOUSAND KOKU CAN FUEL AN ARMY OF 2,500 MEN, AND 25,000 MEN NEED A MILLION KOKU


HOWEVER, FOR DRAMA, IT SOUNDS TOO LITTLE, SO I ADDED 15,000 MEN TO MAKE IT 40,000.

SHIMADA


TOYOKAWA
ZA
ZA
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REACHED
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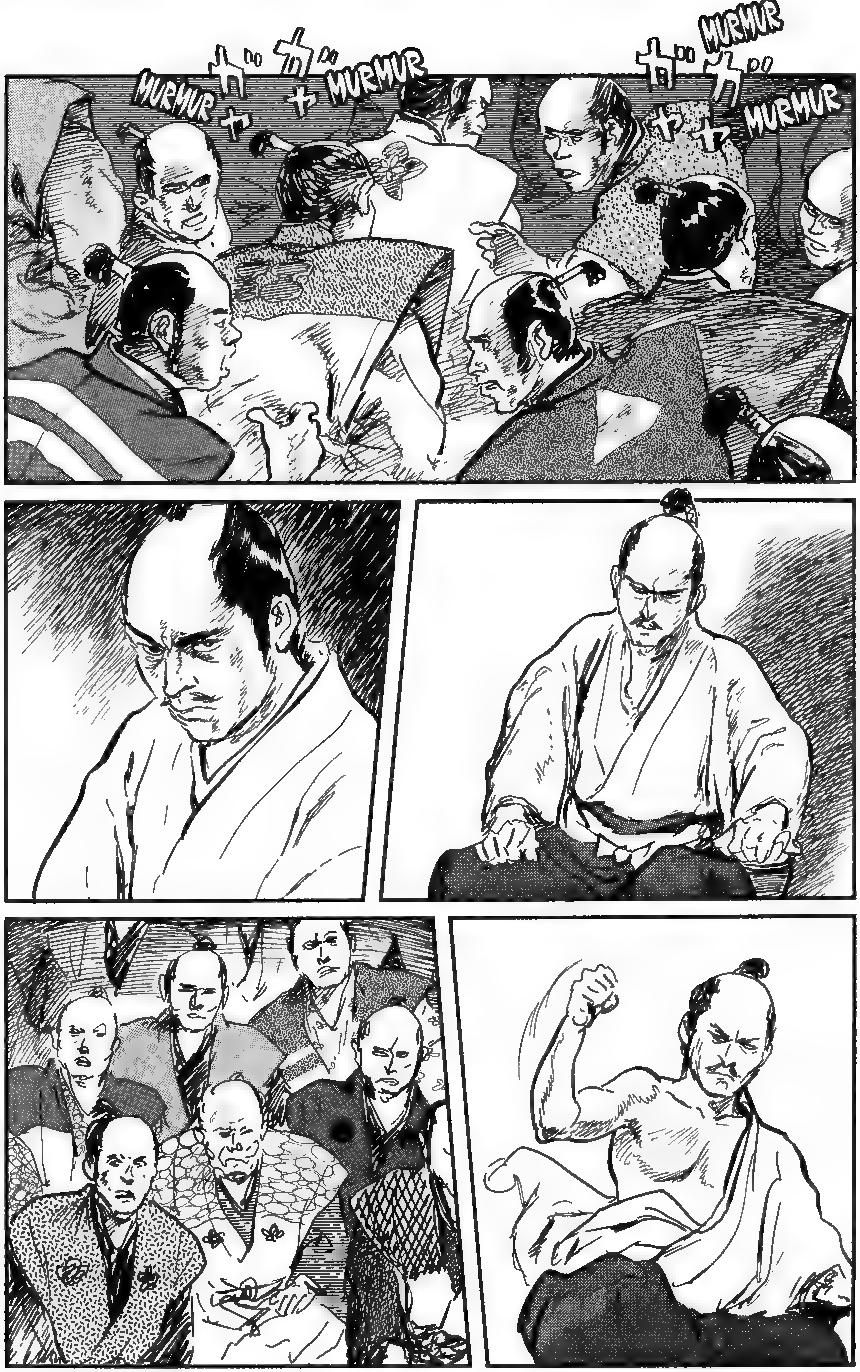
ZA

MUEMUE
MUEMUE
MUEMUE
MUEMUE

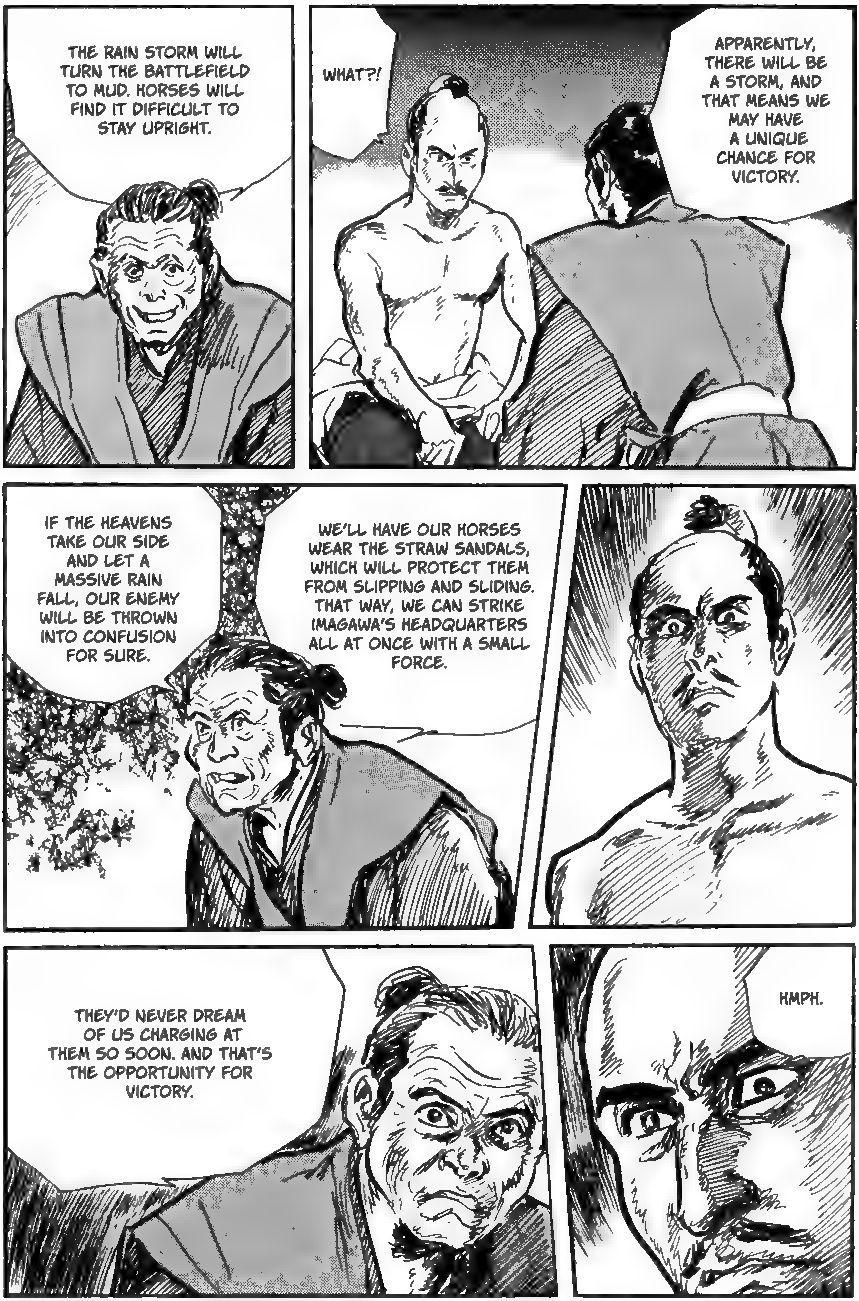

MURMUR
MURMUR
MURMUR
MURMUR

AGAINST IMAGAWA'S 40,000 MEN, WE HARDLY HAVE 10,000. IT'S DEFINITELY A HUGE DISADVANTAGE IF EACH OF US HAS TO FIGHT AGAINST FOUR.
WE SHOULD DEFEND THE CASTLE AND ENDURE THROUGH THE--
I BELIEVE IT IS CRITICAL TO BE PATIENT.
I THINK WE HAVE NO CHOICE EXCEPT TO HOLE UP INSIDE THE CASTLE AND WAIT FOR EACH CHANCE, DRAGGING OUT THE BATTLE.

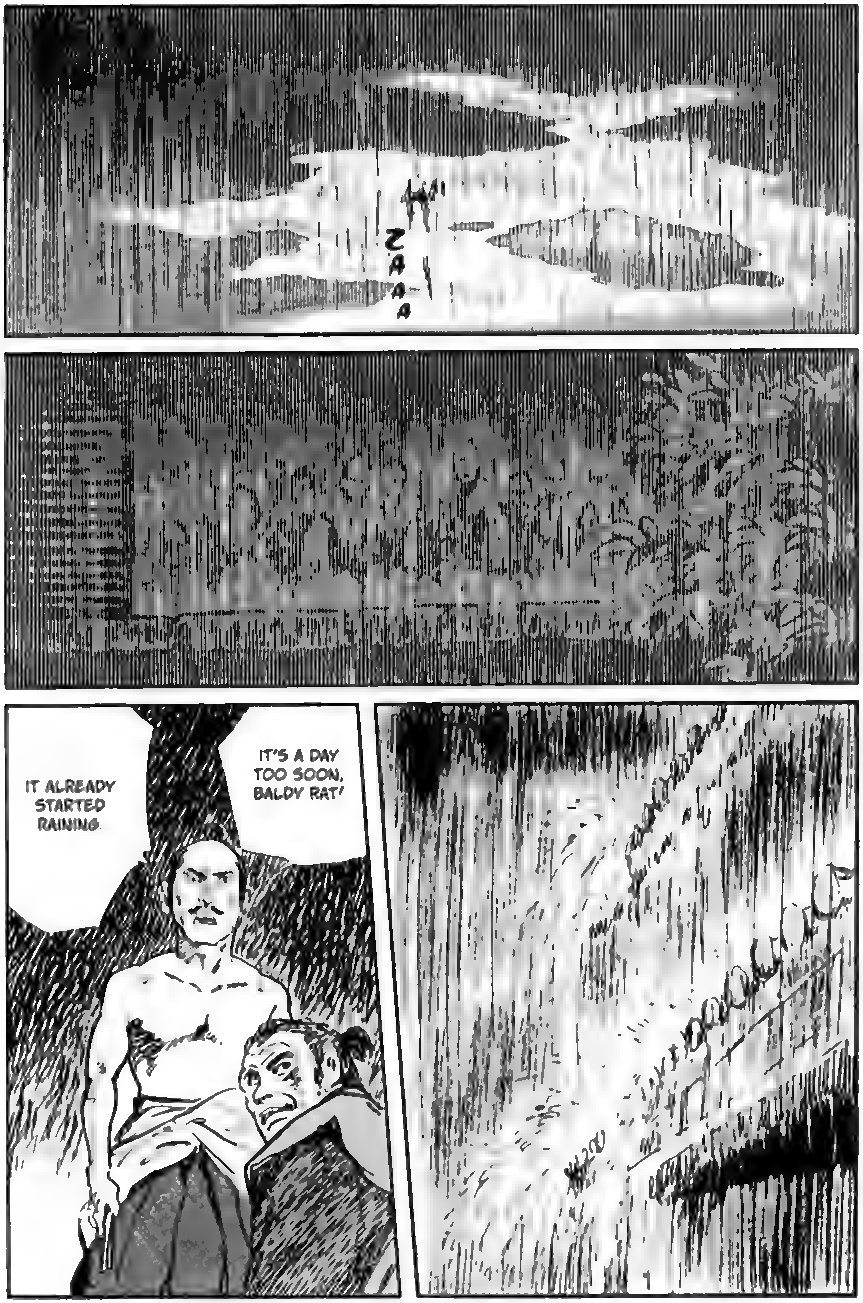
WHERE IS HE?!
WHAT ABOUT THE BALDY RAT?!
WE JUST RECEIVED WORD FROM A SCOUT THAT IMAGAWA'S MAIN FORCE HAS ENTERED KUTSUKAKE CASTLE.
ALLOW ME TO REPORT.
ドドド

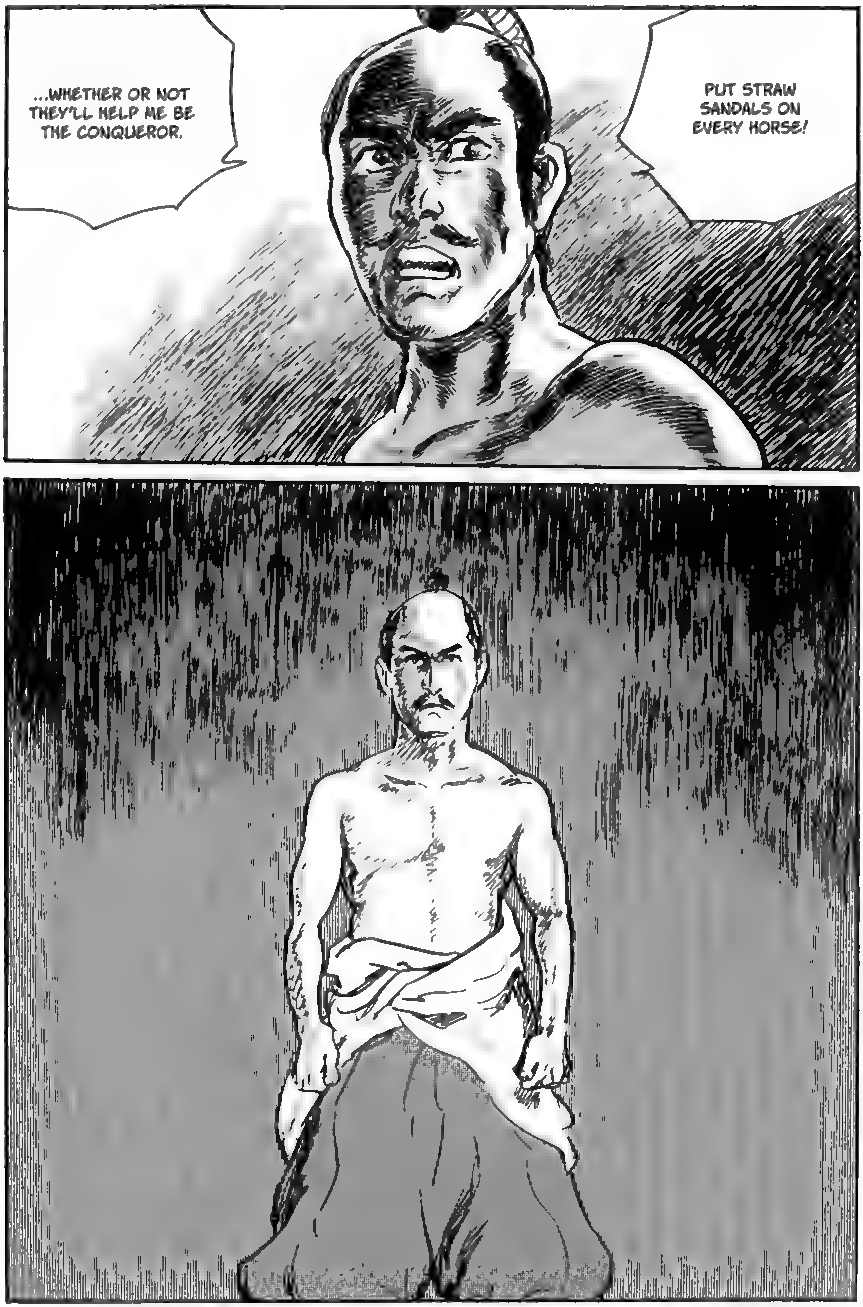
HMM!!
BALDY RAT!!
THEY'RE HERE!
STMP
STMP

MILORD, I WAS GETTING STRAW SANDALS MADE FOR HORSES. WE HAVE ENOUGH FOR A THOUSAND NOW.
YOU UGLY MONSTER! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?!
PLEASE TAKE A LOOK.
THEY TURNED OUT PRETTY GOOD.
WHAT?!
Y... YES! I HAD THE ELDERS WATCH THE SKY TO FORECAST THE WEATHER FOR THE 19TH THROUGH THE 20TH.
STRAW SANDALS FOR HORSES? FOR WHAT?!


THE RAIN STORM WILL TURN THE BATTLEFIELD TO MUD. HORSES WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO STAY UPRIGHT.
WHAT?!
APPARENTLY, THERE WILL BE A STORM, AND THAT MEANS WE MAY HAVE A UNIQUE CHANCE FOR VICTORY.
IF THE HEAVENS TAKE OUR SIDE AND LET A MASSIVE RAIN FALL, OUR ENEMY WILL BE THROWN INTO CONFUSION FOR SURE.
WE'LL HAVE OUR HORSES WEAR THE STRAW SANDALS, WHICH WILL PROTECT THEM FROM SLIPPING AND SLIDING. THAT WAY, WE CAN STRIKE IMAGAWA'S HEADQUARTERS ALL AT ONCE WITH A SMALL FORCE.
THEY'D NEVER DREAM OF US CHARGING AT THEM SO SOON. AND THAT'S THE OPPORTUNITY FOR VICTORY.
HMPH.

COMPARED WITH THE CHANGES OF THE UNIVERSE
A MAN'S LIFE-- FIFTY YEARS
IT IS NOTHING BUT A FLEETING DREAM, AN ILLUSION
SHOULD THERE BE ANY GIVEN LIFE NEVER TO PERISH?


ZAAA
IT ALREADY STARTED RAINING.
IT'S A DAY TOO SOON, BALDY RAT!


...WHETHER OR NOT THEY'LL HELP ME BE THE CONQUEROR.
PUT STRAW SANDALS ON EVERY HORSE!

Chapter On Relinquishing Death

No. 2: Hard Crossroad on the Plain, Part 1

ATTAAAACK!!

KA-BOOM
KA-BOOM

IT WAS THE DAWN OF MAY 19TH IN THE THIRD YEAR OF EIROKU. AS IMAGAWA'S SPEARHEAD, A FORCE OF 2500 MEN LED BY MATSUDAIRA MOTOYASU...
...LAUNCHED ITS ATTACK AGAINST MARUNE FORT. THE FORT WAS ONE OF ODA'S CASTLES. OVER 700 MEN UNDER SAKUMA MORISHIGE DEFENDED IT DESPERATELY.

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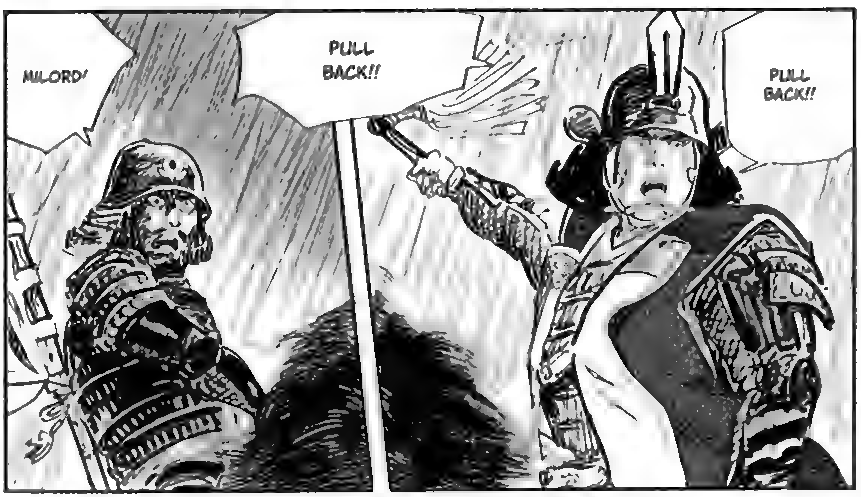
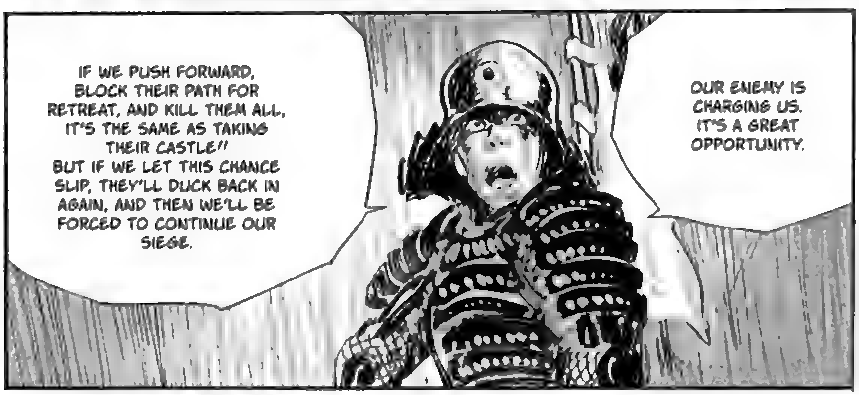
YAAAHHHH
や
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM


MILORD!
PULL BACK!!
PULL BACK!!


IF WE PUSH FORWARD, BLOCK THEIR PATH FOR RETREAT, AND KILL THEM ALL, IT'S THE SAME AS TAKING THEIR CASTLE!! BUT IF WE LET THIS CHANCE SLIP, THEY'LL DUCK BACK IN AGAIN, AND THEN WE'LL BE FORCED TO CONTINUE OUR SIEGE.
OUR ENEMY IS CHARGING US. IT'S A GREAT OPPORTUNITY.

OH, NOT AGAIN!! ARE YOU DEAF TO YOUR LORD? WHY CAN'T YOU SIMPLY DO WHAT YOUR MASTER ORDERS?!
WHY DO YOU ORDER US TO PULL BACK?!
B... BUT....
DESPITE THAT, THEY CAME CHARGING OUT THAT'S BECAUSE THEY ARE TOO PROUD TO DEFEND THEY'D RATHER DETERMINE THE VICTOR OUT IN THE OPEN, AND THEY'RE READY TO DIE FOR IT!!
COMPARED WITH THE LARGE FORCE WE HAVE, THE ENEMY IS SMALL IN NUMBER!! IT WOULD BE NATURAL FOR THEM TO STAY PUT AND DEFEND THEIR CASTLE

やーーーー
YAAAAAA

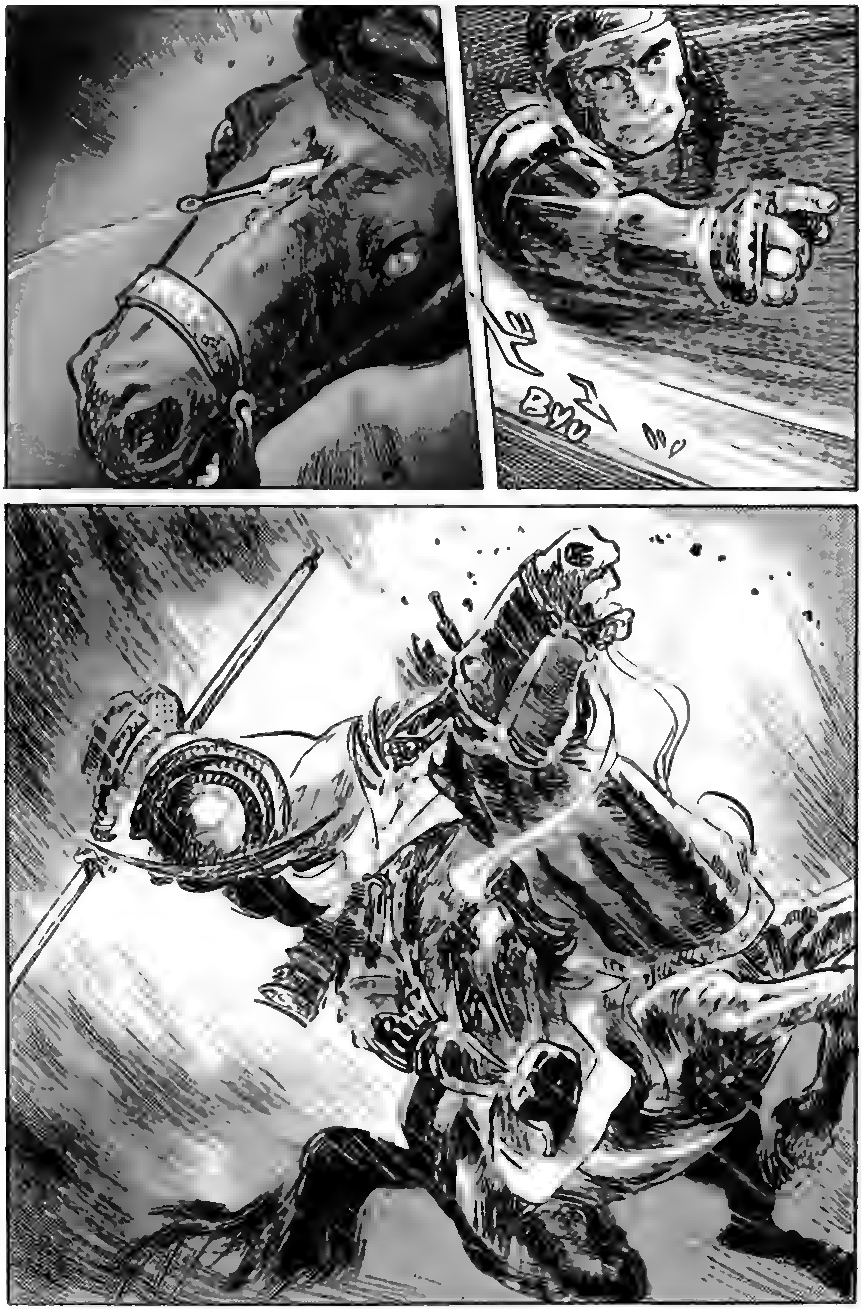
THAT'S WHY I ORDERED YOU TO PULL BACK.
NO MAN IS STRONGER THAN A MAN PREPARED TO DIE!! HE HAS FORMIDABLE POWER.
BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO INTENTION OF RETURNING TO THEIR CASTLE. THEY'LL CHASE US RECKLESSLY.
THAT'S WHY WE PULL BACK. AND IF WE DO, THEY'LL FOLLOW!
WE RELY ON OUR NUMBER AND THINK IT'S A MATTER OF COURSE FOR US TO WIN! WE THINK THE ENEMY WILL DEFINITELY LOSE! THE GAP BETWEEN OUR ATTITUDE AND THEIRS IS HUGE.

THAT'S WHEN THEY'LL THINK OF RETURNING TO THEIR CASTLE. THAT'S WHAT WE'RE WAITING FOR AT THAT POINT, WE'LL REARRANGE OUR TROOPS AND COUNTERATTACK.
BUT IF THEY FOLLOW US TOO DEEP, THEIR WILD COURAGE WILL WEAKEN.
THERE WON'T BE ANY GAP IN ATTITUDE THEN, BECAUSE THE ENEMY WILL BE THINKING OF TURNING BACK!!
I BELIEVE THE OUTCOME OF WAR IS DETERMINED BY THE BATTLE OF MINDS.
WE'LL DEFEND HERE, SO PLEASE PULL BACK FOR NOW!!
M... MILORD! PLEASE PULL BACK.

IT'S TOO LATE!!
IF I, THE HEAD,
PULL BACK AT THIS POINT,
MY TROOPS WILL BE
PUT TO ROUT
LIKE AN AVALANCHE!!
YOU
WOULDN'T
PULL BACK
WHEN I
ORDERED
YOU TO, BUT
NOW YOU'RE
TELLING ME
TO DO THAT
HOW
TIRESOME
YOU ARE.
OVER THERE!
YOU ARE MATSUDAIRA
MOTOYASU, YES?
FIGHT ME!!
DO NOT PULL BACK!!
THE ENEMY IS SMALL
IN NUMBER!!
YOU DON'T NEED
TO BE SCARED
PUSH FORWARD AND
TAKE THEM DOWN!!

URRGHH
KLUDD
YES.
HANZŌ!! AGAINST A SPEAR, I MUST JUMP TO THE LEFT, CORRECT?
NO. I MUST STOP THEIR MOMENTUM RIGHT HERE!
MILORD, LEAVE HIM TO ME!

YES, SIR
AND THEN DEFEND MY BACK, HANZO!!
GET HIM DOWN, HANZO.
ONCE WE GET SAKUMA MORISHIGE OFF HIS HORSE, THEIR CHARGE WILL STOP
YES
AND I AM SAKUMA MORISHIGE!!
MATSUDAIRA MOTOYASU IS HERE!!


BYU

AAAH.
ぬぉ
ぬぬぬ

ぬおぉRRRRRRぃ!

HAAAA!
IT IS ALSO A FOOLISH UNDERTAKING THAT MUST BE PERFORMED EVERY NOW AND THEN IF ONLY TO GAIN THE VASSALS' TRUST
THIS IS A BARRIER THAT MUST BE PASSED THROUGH AT LEAST ONCE.
WARLORDS ARE DESTINED TO HAVE DUELS.

IEYASU THOUGHT IT WAS INDEED NOTHING BUT IDIOCY.
HOW RIDICULOUS FOR THE GENERALS TO FIGHT THEMSELVES! IT GAVE IEYASU'S MOUTH A SHARP, BITTER TASTE.
ONCE A GENERAL IS KILLED, A BATTLE ENDS IN DEFEAT.

SO HE'D BETTER DO IT AT LEAST ONCE, FOR THE SAKE OF THEIR FUTURE TOGETHER. HE'D NEVER HAVE TO DO IT AGAIN.
STIFF IN FEAR, COWERING AND TREMBLING, IEYASU KNEW THAT THE SAMURAI WARRIORS OF MIKAWA-- HIS OWN VASSALS-- ESPECIALLY FAVORED SUCH DUELS.
HIS MUSCLE STRENGTH WAS LESS THAN AVERAGE. INDEED, WHAT HE HAD WAS NO MORE THAN A PEASANT'S SKILL. DIDN'T HE KNOW IT BETTER THAN ANYONE?
HOWEVER, FEAR MERCILESSLY BRACED HIS ENTIRE BODY, AND HIS SWEAT DRIPPED, BLINDING HIS EYES.
THAT WAS THE VERY REASON WHY HE MUSTERED THE RECKLESS COURAGE OF A DOG.

URGH... I CHOSE THE WRONG MAN... TO FIGHT.
AND HIS OPPONENT WAS SAKUMA MORISHIGE, WHOSE VALOR WAS KNOWN TO EQUAL ANY FOUR WARRIORS OF ODA PUT TOGETHER
IF HE DID, HIS VASSALS WOULD OBEY HIM EVEN LESS.
HE COULD SHOUT IN HIS MIND, BUT HE COULD NOT UTTER THOSE WORDS OUT LOUD.
K... HANZÔ... DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS.

DAMN.
DAMN.
DAMN!!
I NEVER WANTED TO BE A WARLORD!
IEYASU WAS AT A LOSS AND CURSED THE HEAVENS.
FACING THIS CROSSROAD, IEYASU FELT LIKE HIS EYEBROWS WERE BURNING.
DAMMIT!!
BLOW A NEEDLE!! BUT DON'T LET ANYONE NOTICE, NOT EVEN MILORD!

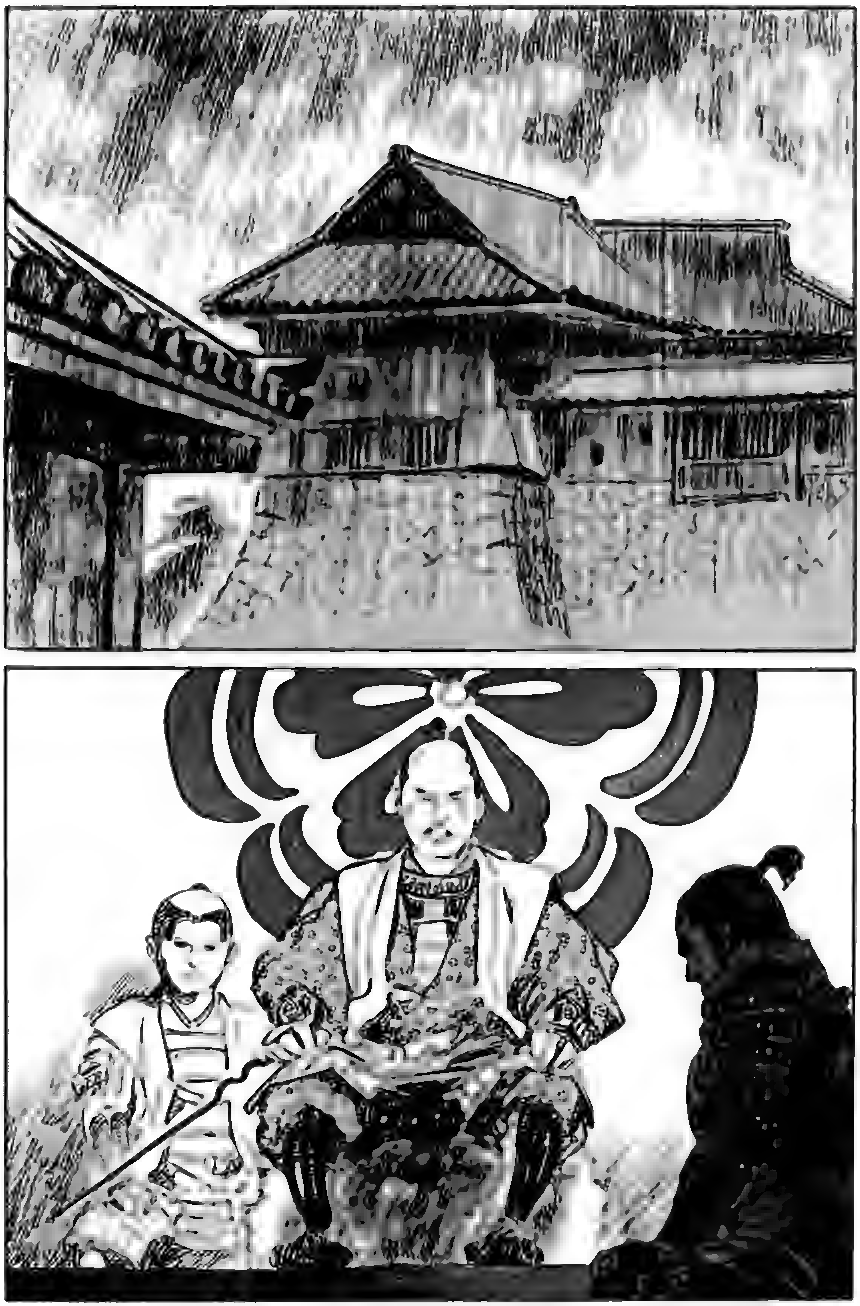
GRRRRR
DUM

URK.
GRNCH
ドスッ
SHUUK
YAAHHH

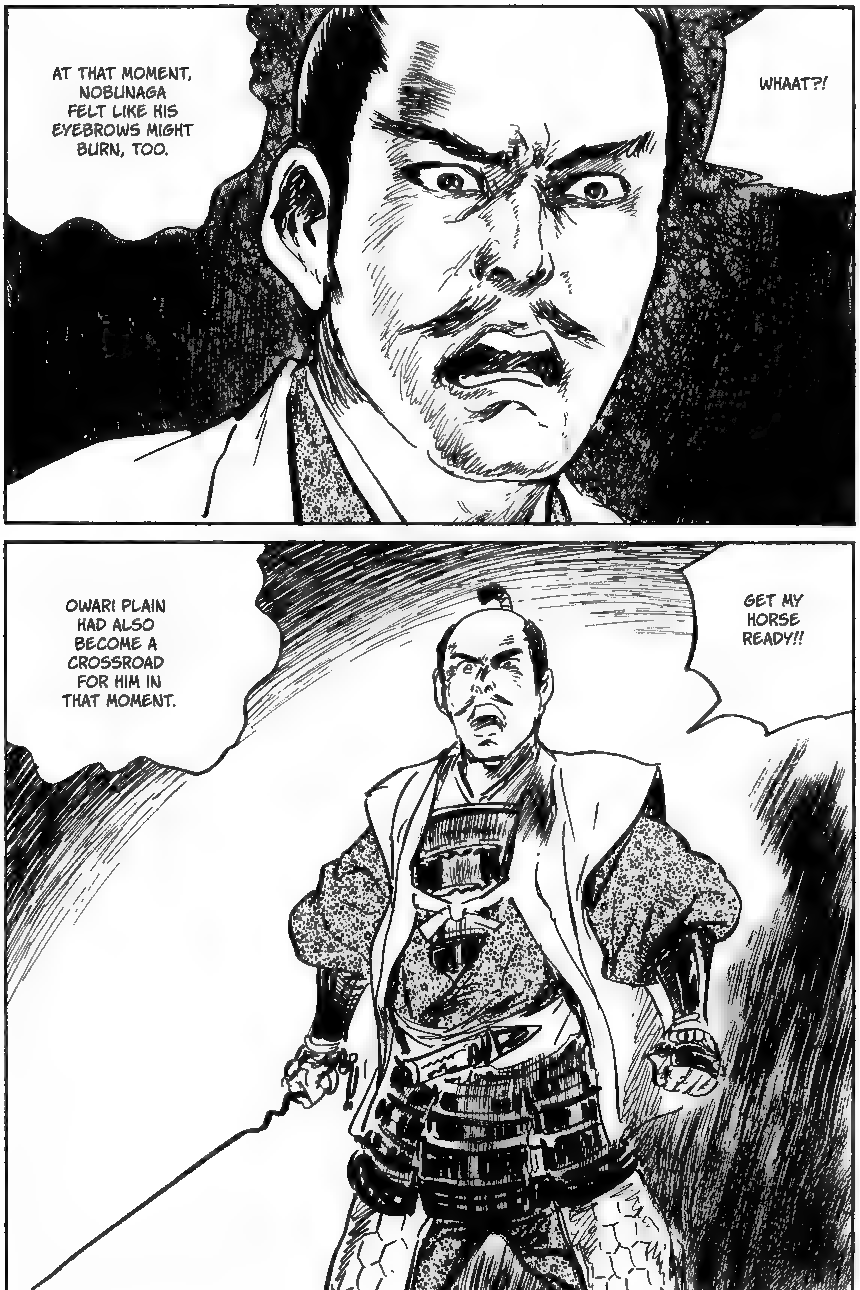
HAA
HAA
GORUH
TSUKUMO, GIVE HIM A FINISHING BLOW.

YEAH.
MM.
MILORD, PLEASE DECLARE VICTORY.
MEN! DO NOT LET THIS CHANCE SLIP BY! BREAK INTO MARUNE NOW!!
MATSUDAIRA MOTOYASU DEFEATED SAKUMA MORISHIGE!!

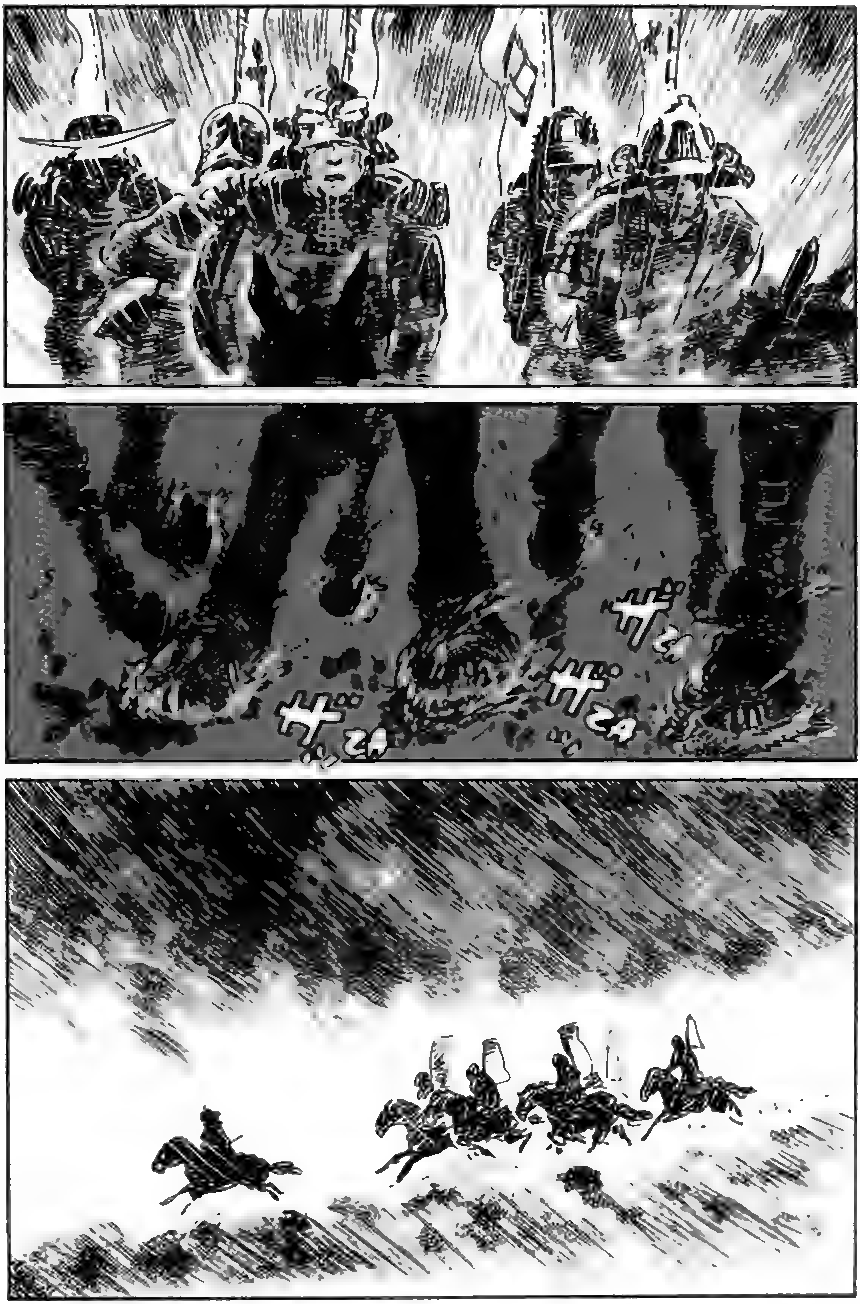
И УААНСКИ
PATEW



STMP
STMP
STMP
STMP
WHO TOOK HIM DOWN?!
MORISHIGE IS DEAD THEN.
...HAS FALLEN!
TH... THE FORT OF MARUNE...
WHA...?
IT WAS MATSUDAIRA MOTOYASU.


AT THAT MOMENT, NOBUNAGA FELT LIKE HIS EYEBROWS MIGHT BURN, TOO.
WHAAT?!
OWARI PLAIN HAD ALSO BECOME A CROSSROAD FOR HIM IN THAT MOMENT.
GET MY HORSE READY!!

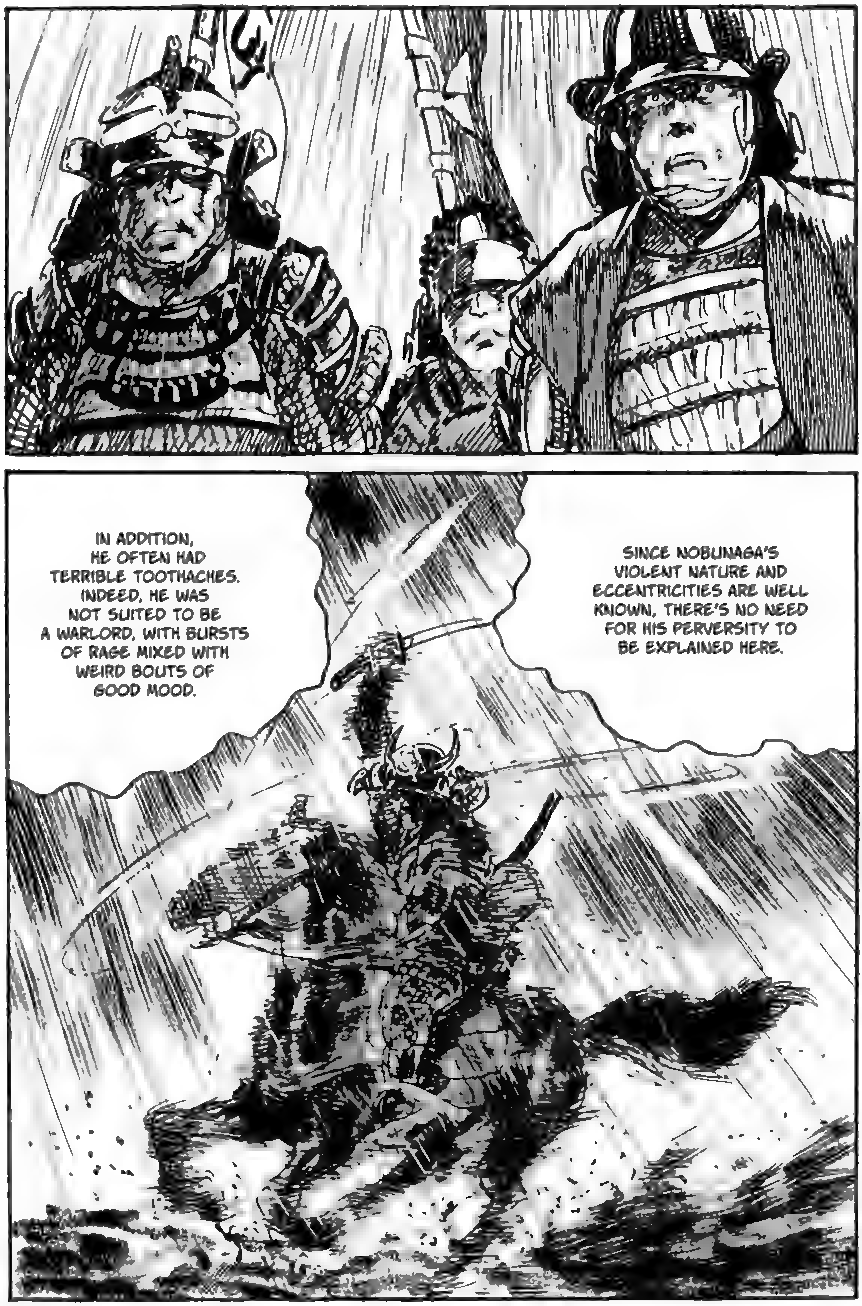
ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA


ドドドド
ドドドド

TAKECHIYO!!
YOU!!
RRRR@#!

YOU, TAKECHIYO!!
AFTER I TOLD YOU TO STAY INSIDE ODAKA CASTLE, HOW DARE YOU CAPTURE MARUNE AND SLAY MORISHIGE!!
I'LL RIP YOU APART!!

RRUS!
WRETCHED TAKECHIYO!!
YOU!


IN ADDITION, HE OFTEN HAD TERRIBLE TOOTHACHES. INDEED, HE WAS NOT SUITED TO BE A WARLORD, WITH BURSTS OF RAGE MIXED WITH WEIRD BOUTS OF GOOD MOOD.
SINCE NOBUNAGA'S VIOLENT NATURE AND ECCENTRICITIES ARE WELL KNOWN, THERE'S NO NEED FOR HIS PERVERSITY TO BE EXPLAINED HERE.

HIS ERRATIC BEHAVIOR COULD EASILY BE ATTRIBUTED TO HIS TOOTHACHES.
AAHHH
THE PAIN MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO THINK.
A VIOLENT ACHE WAS MOLESTING NOBUNAGA THEN.

AH...
UHH...
UHH...

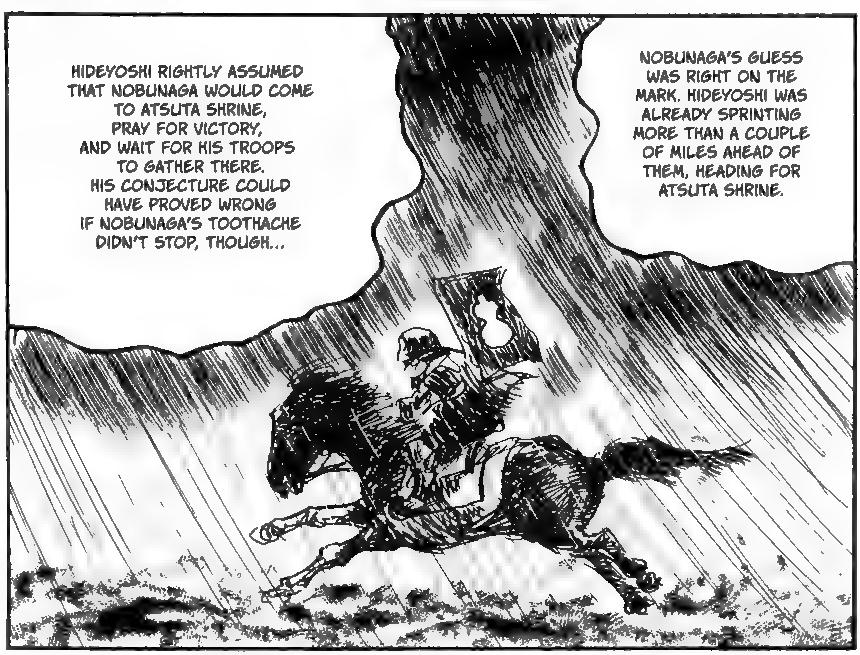
THE MOMENT IT STOPPED, NOBUNAGA FELT A SENSE OF PEACE, THE LIKES OF WHICH HE HAD NEVER FELT BEFORE.
ANYHOW, THIS MAN WAS ABLE TO OVERCOME THE PROBLEMS STACKED AGAINST HIM AND THEN MAKE SOMETHING POSITIVE OUT OF THEM. HE WAS BLESSED WITH GREAT LUCK, I MUST SAY.
THINK HOW YOU FEEL BEFORE YOU VISIT YOUR DENTIST, AND THEN ON THE WAY BACK AFTER YOUR ACHING TOOTH HAS BEEN DEALT WITH.
THIS PEACE GAVE HIM COMPOSURE. READERS, YOU MUST HAVE EXPERIENCED SOMETHING SIMILAR IN YOUR LIFE.

WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF HIS TOOTH HAD KEPT ON ACHING?
IWAMURO SHIGEYASU, HASEGAWA YOSHIHIDE, KATÔ YASABU, YAMAGUCHI HIROYORI, AND SAWAKI TÔHACHI. FIVE OF YOU, KUH?
HMPH!

YES, SIR.
HA HA HA
HA HA HA
HA HA HA
HA HA HA.
ONLY FIVE MEN COULD KEEP UP WITH MY GODLY SPEED.
WHAT ABOUT THE BALDY RAT?

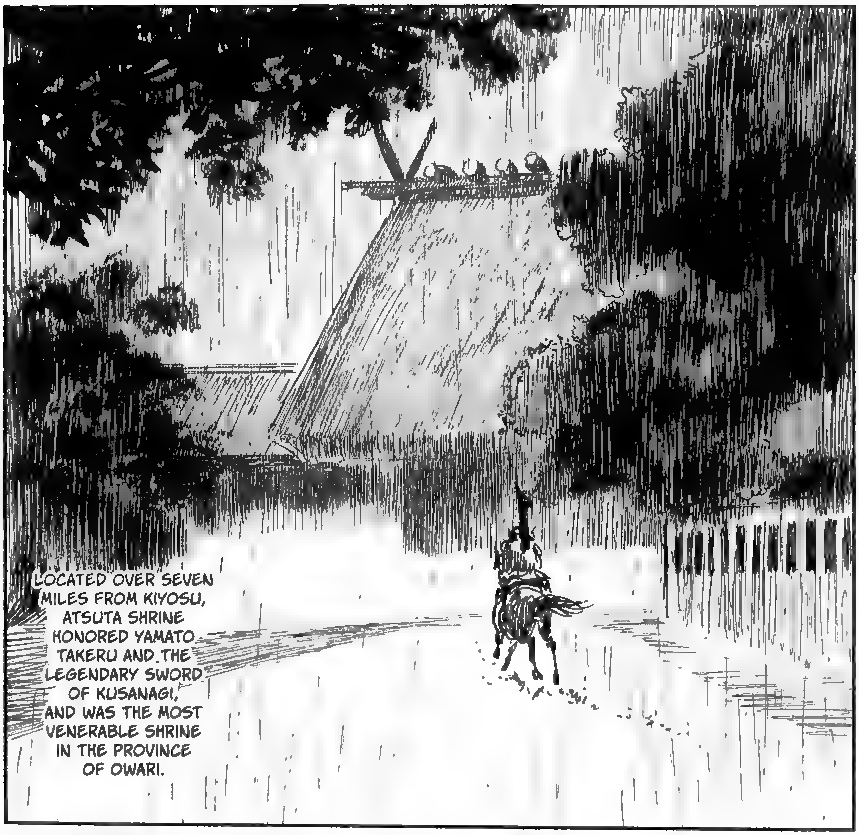
LOOKS LIKE HE HASN'T CAUGHT UP YET.

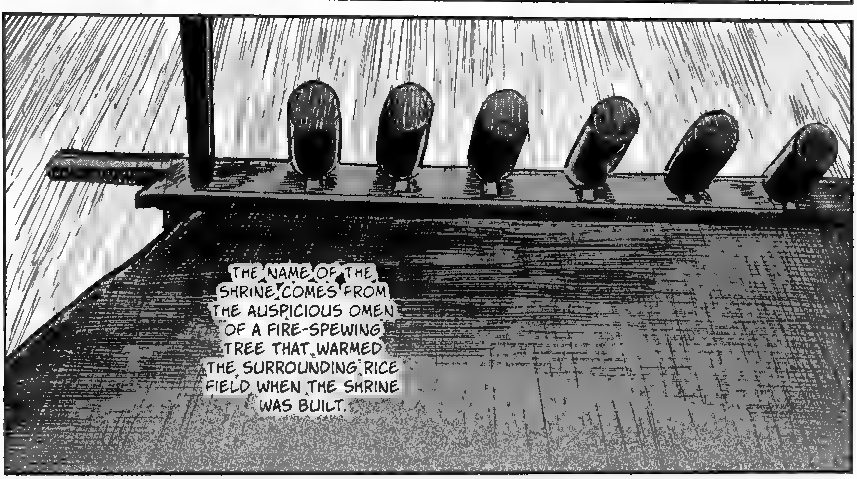
I DOUBT IT. KNOWING HIM, HE COULD VERY WELL BE RUNNING AHEAD OF ME.

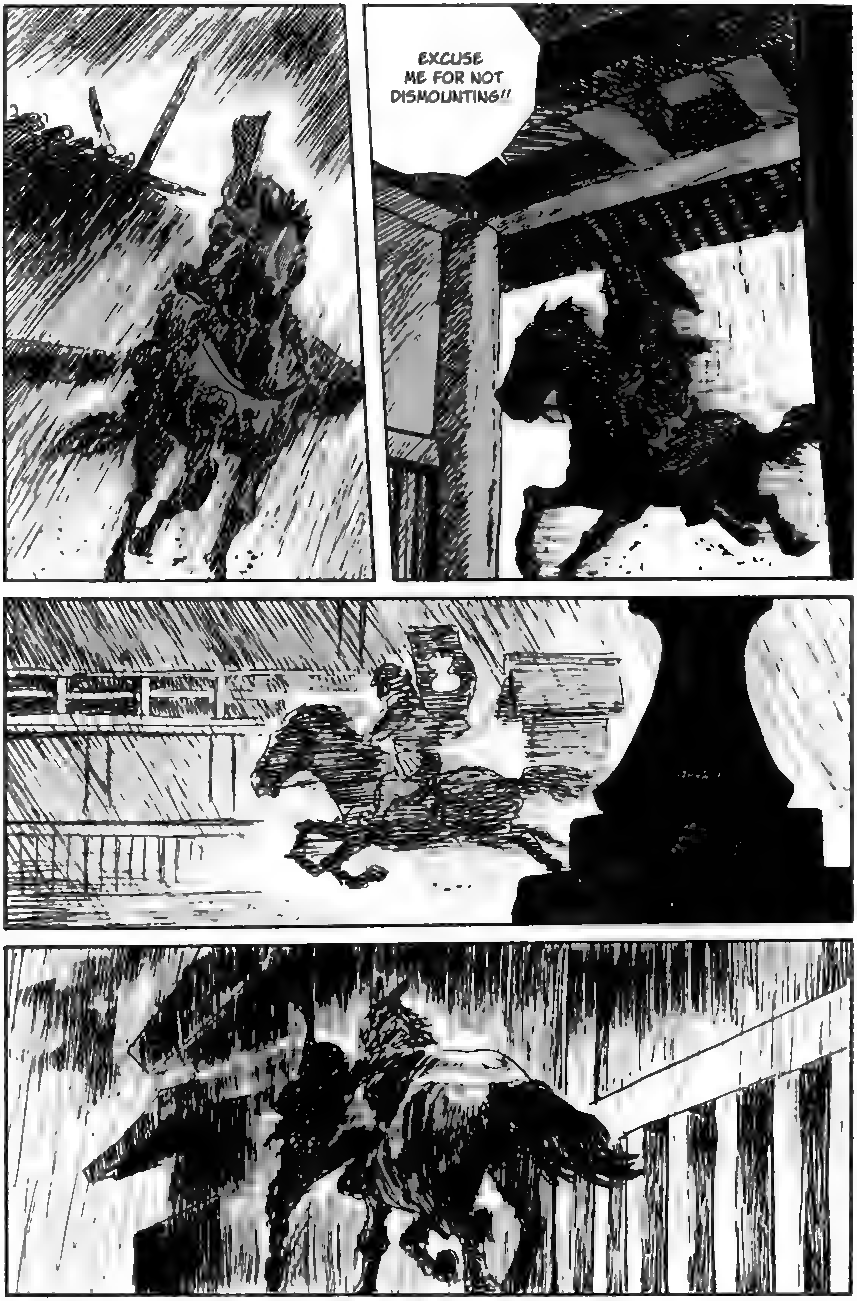

HIDEYOSHI RIGHTLY ASSUMED THAT NOBUNAGA WOULD COME TO ATSUTA SHRINE, PRAY FOR VICTORY, AND WAIT FOR HIS TROOPS TO GATHER THERE. HIS CONJECTURE COULD HAVE PROVED WRONG IF NOBUNAGA'S TOOTHACHE DIDN'T STOP, THOUGH...
NOBUNAGA'S GUESS WAS RIGHT ON THE MARK. HIDEYOSHI WAS ALREADY SPRINTING MORE THAN A COUPLE OF MILES AHEAD OF THEM, HEADING FOR ATSUTA SHRINE.

OTHERWISE, WHO KNOWS WHAT HE WOULD'VE DONE TO HIDEYOSHI FOR NOT STAYING CLOSE BEHIND HIM.
NOBUNAGA, ON THE OTHER HAND, COULD SURMISE WHERE HIDEYOSHI HAD GONE ONLY BECAUSE HE REGAINED HIS COMPOSURE.
HEAD FOR ATSUTA SHRINE!!

I HOPE THE GO-SHINKAN-DONO HAS ALREADY CAUGHT A WHITE HERON.
WHITE HERON!
WHITE HERON!


LOCATED OVER SEVEN MILES FROM KIYOSU, ATSUTA SHRINE HONORED YAMATO TAKERU AND THE LEGENDARY SWORD OF KUSANAGI, AND WAS THE MOST VENERABLE SHRINE IN THE PROVINCE OF OWARI.


THE NAME OF THE SHRINE COMES FROM THE AUSPICIOUS OMEN OF A FIRE-SPEWING TREE THAT WARMED THE SURROUNDING RICE FIELD WHEN THE SHRINE WAS BUILT.


EXCUSE ME FOR NOT DISMOUNTING!!

GO-SHINKAN-DONO!!
GO-SHINKAN-DONO!!
I AM HIYOSHI!!
I AM TŌKICHIRŌ!
IT'S ME, KINOSHITA!
AH HA HA HA HA HA HA.
OH... WOW...

MILORD WILL BE HERE SOON.
AND THE TROOPS FROM KIYOSU, TOO.
AH HA HA HA HA.
I APPRECIATE IT.
IT'S WAR. AH HA HA HA.
PARDON ME FOR COMING IN WITH MY BOOTS.
OH... WOW!
THE WHITE HERON, THE MESSENGER, IS HERE AFTER ALL.
I'M SURE GODS WILL UNDERSTAND.

THAT MORNING, YOSHIMOTO SWITCHED FROM HIS PALANQUIN TO A HORSE AND LEFT KUTSUKAKE CASTLE.

BUHHH
DOSH

OYAKATA-SAMA!
MILORD!
AWW!!
THAT SHOULD DRIVE AWAY THE EVIL SPIRITS. HO HO HO HO HO. WHO KNEW THE GODS COULD BE SO JEALOUS...
TEE HEE HO HO HO HO HO HO HO.
HA HA HA

MOVE OUT!!
BUOOO

GLOSSARY

Atsuta
Located in Nagoya city, Aichi prefecture.

Atsuta shrine
A Japanese Shinto shrine in Atsuta-ku, Nagoya. It is known as the second-most venerable shrine in Japan.

Blue Flag
Known as *ayame* in Japanese, a member of the genus iris of the iridaceae. Its scientific name is iris Virginica.

Chiryu
A city in Aichi prefecture.

hachimaki
A hachimaki is a stylized headband, usually made of red or white cloth, worn as a symbol of perseverance or effort, originating in Japan.

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Path of the Assassin*:
chan – for children, young women, and close friends
dono – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures
san – the most common, used among equals or near-equals
sama – used for superiors
sensei – used for teachers, masters, respected entertainers, and politicians.

itto
Approximately eighteen liters, which is about four gallons.

jijisama
Grandfather.

Kakegawa
A river that runs through the west part of Shizuoka prefecture. It is also the name of a city located in Shizuoka prefecture.

kame
Turtle.

kemari
Kemari is a so-called sport that was popular in Japan and China in the Heian period. The object of kemari is to keep a small, deerskin ball in the air, with all players cooperating to do so.

Kippōshi
Oda Nobunaga's first given name (i.e., his infant/childhood name) before he changed his name to Nobunaga.

koku
180 liters.

mitsumono
A system of three types of warriors who specialized in information gathering established by Takeda Shingen.

moto-moto yasui
Cheap by nature.

Nagao
The Nagao clan was a family of daimyo, feudal lords who built and controlled Kasugayama castle and the surrounding fief, in what is now Niigata prefecture.

Nobumori, Sakuma
(1527- 1581) A retainer of Oda clan. He has been also called Dewa no Suke and Uemon no I.

oyakatasama
A term used to address the head of the clan by the clan members. It translates to "house lord."

shinkan
Shrine priest.

Sūfu Sessai, Taigen
(d. 1557) Also known as Taigen Sessai, a Japanese abbot and mountain ascetic. He was the uncle of Imagawa Yoshimoto, and served him as military advisor and as commander of Imagawa's forces, despite his lack of any formal battle training or experience.

Takechiyo
Motoyasu's infant/childhood name.

tsukumo
"Tsu" means "nine," "ku" means "ten," and "mo" also means "nine."

tsuru
Crane.

Ujizane
(1538-1614) Son of Yoshimoto Imagawa. After Yoshimoto's death he was attacked by Shingen and Ieyasu. Ujizane later retaliated at the Takeda army by stopping their supply of salt. This had little effect and only resulted in the downfall of the Imagawa clan. Like his father he also enjoyed playing kemari.

yoroidoshi
A dagger-like thrusting blade, long enough to penetrate armor and reach a vital organ, inflicting a killing blow.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman*, Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku*, a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

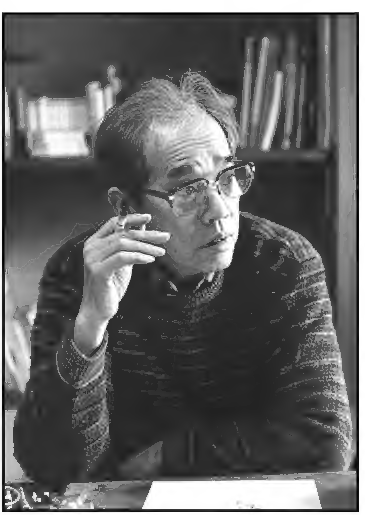
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

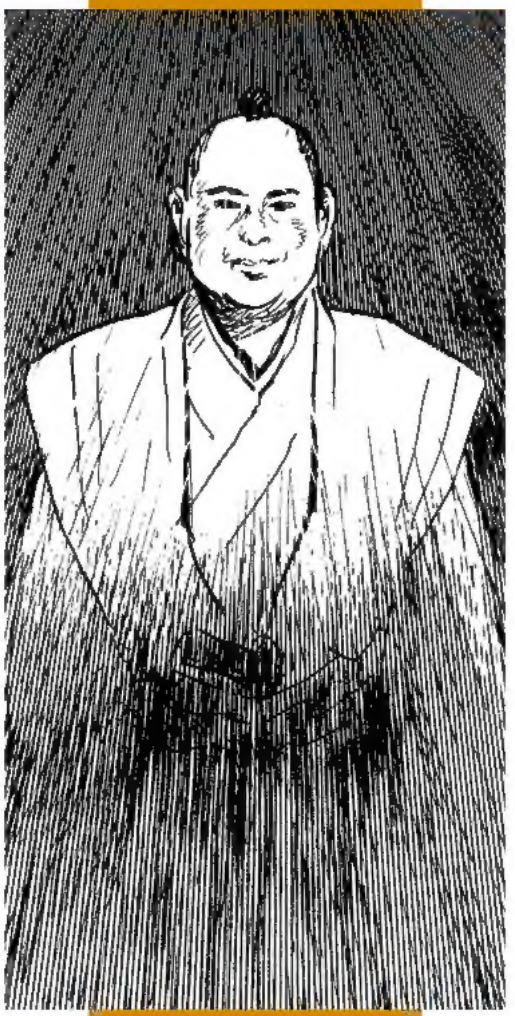
In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami* (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). Many additional series would follow, including *Path of the Assassin* and *Samurai Executioner*.

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of seventy-one.



GRAPHIC NOVEL / MANGA



Young Hattori Hanzō is a very busy young man. Charged with protecting a teen who will one day unite Japan, Hanzo, a young ninja called a *"suppa,"* must work from the shadows, training his young master, assisting him in battle, and spying on enemies and lovers. It's the Sengoku period. Clans across the country are scrambling to battle, making alliances and breaking them just as quickly. Brothers and sons go after uncles and fathers. Deceit is as commonplace as rain. And to be a ninja means fighting in the shadows and listening for the whispers from the grass. It's a tough spot for a boy of fifteen, but Hattori Hanzō is no regular boy, and anyone unlucky enough to find themselves in his path will find out how atypical he can be.

Published in the original Japanese right-to-left format, *Path of the Assassin* is yet another masterpiece of manga literature from *Lone Wolf and Cub* creators Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima.

Lifelong Friends, with the Same Dreams, Striving to Grow into a Rising River.

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